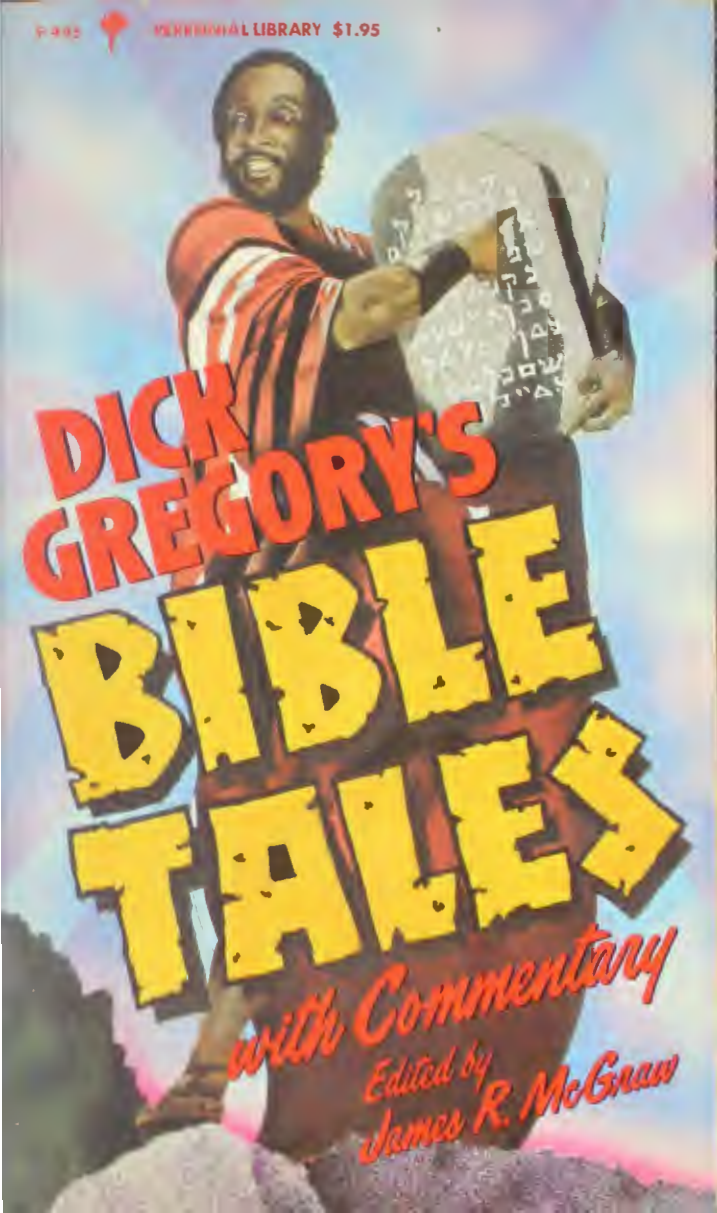
P 905 PERENNIAL LIBRARY $1.95



DICK GREGORY'S BIBLE TALES

with Commentary

Edited by James R. McGraw

HUMOR/RELIGION

DICK GREGORY'S BIBLE TALES

Dick Gregory takes on the biggest best-seller of all time: an unauthorized translation with hilarious commentary.

"To all those good folks past and present who've made the Living Bible a way of life instead of a new translation!"—The Dedication

"*Dick Gregory's Bible Tales* are much like the original scriptures: a touch of humor, a great deal of prophecy, and a clearly focused universal moral wisdom."—The Reverend Ralph Abernathy

"This is Dick Gregory's best book. It is wise, funny, sad, angry, personally inspirational, socially prophetic, and always honest. Read it!"—Malcolm Boyd

PERENNIAL LIBRARY  HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS

Cover Design By Irving Freeman ISBN: 0-06-08

Dick Gregory's Bible Tales, with Commentary

By the same author:

Dick Gregory's Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat: Cookin' with Mother Nature

Dick Gregory's Political Primer

No More Lies: The Myth and the Reality of American History

Write Me In!

The Shadow That Scares Me

What's Happening

Nigger

From the Back of the Bus

Dick Gregory's Bible Tales, with Commentary

BY DICK GREGORY

EDITED BY JAMES R. McGRAW



PERENNIAL LIBRARY
Harper & Row, Publishers
New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London

A hardcover edition of this book is published by Stein and Day, Publishers. It is here reprinted by arrangement.

DICK GREGORY'S BIBLE TALES. Copyright © 1974 by Richard Claxton Gregory. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address Stein and Day, Publishers, Scarborough House, Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. 10510. Published simultaneously in Canada by Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited, Toronto.

First PERENNIAL LIBRARY edition published 1978

ISBN: 0-06-080445-9

78 79 80 81 82 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

To all those good folks past
and present who've made
the Living Bible a way of life
instead of a new translation!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to thank Jeannette Hopkins once again for her wise counsel, understanding, persistence, and editorial expertise. Her appreciation of the old-time religion made work on this manuscript an added joy.

I also want to thank the two Jims—James Sanders and James R. McGraw—for their combined contribution to any wit and wisdom in these pages.

Also, my heartfelt gratitude to those good friends and followers of natural and spiritual wisdom: Anna Mae Gibson, Sally Wales, Alvenia Fulton, Lillian Cosby, James Black, and Jertha Love.

For their special help in all my endeavors, I'd like to thank Ralph Mann, Robert Chuck, Marvin Josephson, and Marge Casciello of the International Famous Agency in New York City; Robert Walker of the American Program Bureau in Boston; Bernie Kleinman, Dick Shelton, Jean Williams, Elaine Shepherd, Mike Watley, Herman Grammer, and my brother-in-law, the Reverend Christopher Smith.

Finally, words of love and gratitude to my wife and partner in creation, Lillian, and the beautiful results of our obedience to the command, "Be fruitful, and multiply"—Michele, Lynne, Pamela, Paula, Stephanie, Gregory, Miss, Christian, Ayanna, and Yohance.

Contents

Acknowledgments 7

PART I: THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. First Things First *(Genesis 1:1-2:3)* 15
2. A Couple of Specifics *(Genesis 2:4-24)* 23
3. The Garden State *(Genesis 3:2-24)* 30
4. The First Hi-Rise *(Genesis 11:1-9)* 37
5. The Cain Mutiny *(Genesis 4:1-16)* 42
6. In and Out of Deep Water *(Genesis, Chapters 6-9)* 46
7. The Price of Being Famous *(Genesis, Chapters 12-17, 21-22)* 52
8. Strangers and Other Lovers *(Genesis 18:20-19:29)* 57
9. The ABC's of Slavery 63
 A. Dealing with the Dreamer *(Genesis, Chapter 37)*
 B. The Butler, the Baker, and the Captain's Wife *(Genesis, Chapters 39-40)*
 C. Feast and Famine *(Genesis, Chapter 41)*

10. Up the River and into a Foster Home *(Exodus 1:8-2:10)* 75

11. A Talking Bush! Hot Stuff *(Exodus, Chapters 2-4)* 79

12. Let My People Go! *(Exodus, Chapters 5-15)* 82

13. See the Hebrew People Run! See the Egyptians Follow! See the Red Sea! See Pharaoh See Red! *(Exodus, Chapters 14-15)* 88

14. The New Morality *(Exodus, Chapters 19-20, 32-34)* 91

15. Outside Agitators *(Joshua, Chapter 6)* 101

16. The Dangers of a First Haircut: The Story of Samson and Delilah *(Judges, Chapters 13-16)* 106

17. The Bigger They Come *(I Samuel, Chapter 17)* 112

18. Divide and Conquer *(I Kings, 3:16-28)* 117

19. The Water Gate Hearing *(Nehemiah, Chapter 8)* 123

20. Who's King of the King of the Beasts? *(Daniel, Chapters 1, 6)* 128

21. A Whale of an Order *(Jonah, Chapters 1-4)* 135

PART II: THE NEW TESTAMENT

22. A Star is Born *(Luke 2:1-7; Matthew 2:1-12)* 147

23. Dialogue with the Devil *(Matthew 3-4:11; Mark 1:1-13; Luke 3:3-4:13)* 152

24. Offing the Pigs *(Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-17; Luke 8:26-37)* 159

25. 5 Loaves Plus 2 Fishes Equals 12 Baskets of Leftovers *(Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17)* 163

26. Let Go of Things *(Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)* 167

27. Letting Your Seeds Fall Where They May *(Mark 4:3-8; Matthew 13:3-8; Luke 8:5-8)* 170

28. There'll Be Some Surprises! *(Matthew 25:31-46)* 173

29. There Goes The Neighborhood *(Luke 10:25-37)* 177

30. Turn About Is Fair Play *(Matthew 18:21-35)* 181

31. Minimum Wage *(Matthew 20:1-16)* 185

PART I: *The Old Testament*

1
First Things First

(Genesis 1:1-2:3)

In the beginning, there was nothing—only God. All else was deep, dark, and out of sight. Apart from the word of God, the troubled waters had neither form nor meaning nor purpose.

Since darkness was upon the face of the deep, God's first task was to get some light on the subject matter. So God simply said, "Let there be light." And wouldn't you know, there *was* light!

God was very pleased and said, "Now that's really boss!" Then, realizing Who was The One and Only Boss, God chuckled and said, "I mean that's really deep—outa sight!"

So the word of God separated the light from the darkness, and God called the light Day and the darkness Night. And there was evening and morning, the first full day.

Then God said, "Let there be firmament to separate the waters from each other." Firmament sounded much better than dry ground, which is what God meant. God called the waters Seas and the dry land Earth. And there was a second day. Much, much later there were maps.

The next day God set aside for landscape gardening.

God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, and herbs, and trees, and all kinds of plants with seeds in them, and especially fruit trees which will yield fruit with seeds also."

God made every plant yielding seed for the purpose of eating. A long time later, living creatures began killing and eating each other, but that was their doing and not God's.

On the fourth day, God installed lighting. God hung two great lights in the firmament of the heavens, the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night. And all around the Sun and the Moon, God hung the planets and the stars to rule over the days and nights and seasons and life on earth.

Then God saw the need for tenants. So God spent the next two days arranging for population growth. God spoke, saying, "Let the waters bring forth googobs of living creatures, and let winged creatures fly above the earth." So God created great whales and little fishes, eagles and pigeons, every living thing that fills the air and the waters.

God spoke again, saying, "Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures, cattle and creeping things, beasts of the fields and jungles." The earth swarmed with creatures. And God liked and blessed them all and said, "Be fruitful and multiply all over the place." And they did.

Then God thought, "There's something missing. We need some folks around here to go along with the critters. Let there be folks who will be in my likeness, male *and* female, who can take good care of things, who can love each other and be responsible for the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle and the other beasts, and even the creeping things that creep upon the earth." So God created folks, all kinds of folks.

God blessed them and told them, "Be fruitful and fill the earth and take control of it." And God laid down the rules,

saying, "Behold, I've given you all the green plants yielding seed and all the trees with seed in the fruit to be used as food, for you and all the other living things that have the breath of life."

And the folks seemed to understand, and God was pleased and thought the whole setup was very good. It was the sixth day. God said, "That's heavy work. But it was worth it. It's really beautiful."

God took the whole day off the next day.

Commentary

Everything God set up in six days, folks have spent the rest of human history destroying. We've tampered with all God's interior decorating and outside lighting. God established day and night, and we carve it up into time zones and daylight savings. Rather than showing respect for Almighty God, Divine Wisdom, and Universal Order, we act like Cole Porter invented Night and Day!

God planted trees, and we cut them down to make houses, furniture, and paper. The pulverized trees are used to make cigarette papers. Then some careless smoker drops a lighted cigarette in the forest. To make matters worse, instead of listening to God we need some funny-looking bear in a Boy Scout hat begging us not to burn down the forest!

By the way, I've never trusted Smokey the Bear. I've always wondered what happened to the Boy Scout who was wearing that hat in the first place.

In the name of progress, folks engaged in an Industrial Revolution. But they failed to cut God and Mother Nature in on their revolution. Now the air is so polluted we can't even see the stars in our cities, and the sun's rays can't

penetrate the smokescreen. Our lights have been shut off because we didn't pay the bill of respect for nature which God requires.

Not only have we shut out the sun, we've polluted the moon also. After each moon shot, all kinds of garbage and hardware are left behind on the moon's surface. Folks have littered up the moon just like they litter up the parks and picnic grounds down on earth. Now we're getting ready to mar Mars.

Instead of being *caretakers* of God's creatures, folks have been *exterminators.* They've said by their actions, "We come to bury God's creation, not to praise it." But there's a price folks must pay for turning their back on God, for ignoring Divine Wisdom and Universal Order.

There is a Universal Supreme Court presiding over life. It renders its decisions based upon the law of karma. Karmic law is the law of cause and effect. It is summed up in the simple teaching, "As ye sow, so shall ye reap." The law of karma ensures that evil acts will bring evil consequences. Deeds not in tune with the natural order will produce a distortion. It is simply a fact of life, it's the way the Universal Order operates.

In his book *The Thunder of Silence,* Joel S. Goldsmith writes:

God never rewards virtue. God never punishes sin. True, sin is punished—by the sin. In other words, the person who makes the wrong electrical connection will be burned, but he cannot blame the electricity for this. The electricity did not punish him: he brought about his own punishment by his incorrect act. The person who gets into the water, becomes frightened, flounders around, and finally almost drowns cannot blame the water, but rather, his ignorance of how to behave in the water. No one can violate law and not be punished for such violation; but no one

should blame God for the ensuing punishment. The fault lies not in God but in individual conduct and in individual misperception of the nature of the law of karma.

The Universal Order is not like the legal system set up by human beings. Under that legal system, you're all right as long as you don't get caught. Even if you do get caught, you're innocent until proven guilty. Under the law of karma, as soon as you commit an act of wrongdoing you are already caught, and there is nothing more to prove. You're guilty!

It's like a great Computer Bank in the sky. All wrong deeds, ego trips, acts of selfish pride, or violations against our fellow creatures (including the natural environment) are recorded on the Universal Computer Program card. When the card is fed into the computer, we get a printout of the consequences of our past misdoings.

We see the law of karma operating every day. While the war in Southeast Asia was raging full scale, and American planes and pilots were causing terror in cities and villages of Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam, Southeast Asian folks were afraid to walk the streets for fear of being killed by the Americans lurking somewhere in the clouds. It's no accident that at the same time Americans here at home became increasingly reluctant to walk the streets of their own cities, afraid of being maimed or killed by other Americans lurking in the shadows. It's the law of karma.

To cut down crime in the streets of New York City, special high-intensity sodium street lights were installed. The city spent fifteen million dollars to illuminate 1,088 miles of streets and planned to spend an additional thirty-five million. All of a sudden, a Department of Agriculture study appeared, showing that the new street lights were

murdering the trees! The lamps confused the trees by reversing God's arrangement of night and day, summer and winter. Young trees froze to death because the lamps kept them growing longer into the fall than they naturally would. Once the wheel of karma starts turning, it cannot be stopped.

The April 22, 1974, issue of *Time* magazine reported the law of karma in operation. An article entitled "Why Those Tapes Were Made" explained that the secret White House recording system was set up because President Nixon was on an ego trip. Said *Time:* "Nixon yearned to write one day a definitive work that would be the classic of presidential memoirs."

Pride goeth before a fall. The wheel of karma has turned. Those same tapes contain the official record of other things President Nixon's ego trip caused him to do. So he has tried desperately to hide the tapes from the impeachment laws of the land. But the law of karma has already spoken.

In his inaugural address of January 14, 1963, Governor George Wallace of Alabama told his cheering audience: "I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny; and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." Five months later Governor Wallace stood at the door of the University of Alabama to block the entry of two Black students accompanied by federal officials. A court injunction and a presidential proclamation had ordered him not to interfere. The state National Guard was federalized and, the same afternoon, the Black students were registered at gunpoint under the law of the land.

Nine years later the same George Wallace stood before another cheering crowd in a shopping center in Laurel, Maryland, seeking the nomination for the same office he

had ignored and abused nearly a decade before. As he tried to leave the shopping center, his exit was blocked by a would-be assassin (or assassins) whose sentiments were registered at gunpoint. The law of karma once more.

The law of karma was operating from the beginning of creation. God created all living creatures. Then God said, "Let there be folks to take care of things." But folks turned on the other living creatures. They made weapons to kill animals for food and to defend themselves against any animals who might resent being eaten. Folks became fishers and big-game hunters. Animals were killed for sport and their heads displayed as wall trophies. Other animals were domesticated and brought into folks' homes as "pets" or placed in cages in the zoo.

The wheel of karma turned, and folks found out those weapons could be used against themselves. Folks began doing the same thing to their own kids that they did to the animals. They domesticated their sons in the name of patriotism, telling them it was "unpatriotic" to want to be wild and free and unbridled by military obligation.

Then they sent their kids off to the Big Game called War, and the domesticated youth became both the hunters and the hunted. Those who were lucky enough to come home from battle were sent off to schools, and the domesticating process continued. This time it was called "education."

Education derives from the Latin word "to lead" or "bring out." Schools are meant to be natural places of learning, where instinctive knowledge and spiritual wisdom are brought out and nurtured; instead they have been designed as places of *indoctrination,* where young people are taught to absorb the curriculum dictated by their elders.

Even worse, true *education* has been replaced by *segregation.* Instead of bringing out, schools have become

committed to keeping out. No true educator, one committed to bringing out natural spiritual wisdom, could ever participate in a segregated school system.

So the schools became the zoos, and the big-game hunters continued to practice their sport on Wall Street, in the Pentagon, on Capitol Hill, and in the White House. The law of karma cannot be broken.

2
A Couple of Specifics

(Genesis 2:4-24)

You may have noticed that God hadn't created rain yet. God used moisture to bring forth life from the earth, and didn't create plants and trees and folks all at once. God created folks one at a time. God went about it this way.

The Lord God first caused a mist to surround the face of the ground, which watered down the earth, and the wetness created mud. The Lord God thought the mud had great potential. So the Lord God took the wet dust and sculpted out a man. But the Lord God knew a mud statue could never till the ground, so the Lord God breathed into the man's nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. From the very beginning, man was an earthy soul brother.

In the midst of the Garden of Eden, in the East, the Lord God put the man. All around the man were the plants and trees, and in the middle of the garden was the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Food Trees and the Learning Tree. A river flowed through the garden; the water fresh and pure and unpolluted, the source of life and health.

The Lord God told the man, "You may eat and enjoy the fruit of all these trees in the garden except one. Don't eat the fruit of the Learning Tree. Don't even touch it, 'cause if you do, it'll be the death of you!" Then the Lord God left the man alone in Eden to be the caretaker of the garden.

Then the Lord God got to thinking, "It's not good that man should be all alone there in the garden. I think I'll give him some company." The Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air and every other fowl, and brought them all to Adam (God had named him Adam). Whatever Adam called every living creature, that was its name. He named the cattle, and the beasts, and the birds. But Adam still needed a main squeeze, a helpmeet so to speak, and cows, gorillas, elephants, and chickens were no help in meeting his needs.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. While Adam was heavy into copping his z's, the Lord God took one of Adam's ribs, closed up the hole, leaving no scar, and made a woman. Of course, if Adam had any notion what was about to happen, he'd have snatched the rib out himself!

The Lord God brought the woman to Adam, and Adam said, "At last! This is something I can get next to; bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. No fur and no feathers!" And still into his naming bag, Adam said, "I'll call her Wo-man, because she was taken out of man. Besides, Wo-Adam sounds silly."

So Adam and his woman became husband and wife. There was no church wedding or any marriage certificate, but they were husband and wife just the same. They were both naked, but neither the Lord God nor the animals nor the bride and groom thought anything about it. But then

you've got to remember, there was no Supreme Court yet either.

Commentary

God created Adam out of the mud of the ground. So he was the very first really down-to-earth cat! There's something about "earthy" folks that shows the basics of raw humanity. Earthy folks don't try to be sophisticated, to put on airs or be anybody else than who they are. They're just folks!

Earthy folks act on instinct, so they can't be messed with or tricked. Sophisticated folks will allow themselves to be manipulated and believe anything. For example, sophisticated folks travel by air, and earthy folks use the Fast Dog (Greyhound bus).

The airlines get by with anything they want to in dealing with their sophisticated passengers, giving excuses about the plane's being full or delayed, or the schedule's being changed. But Greyhound would never dare deal with their earthy passengers that way. Those earthy passengers would climb on board the bus and drive it away themselves!

My cousin is one of those earthy passengers. He used to come to Chicago every year to visit me. When he got ready to leave, he'd pack a box of fried chicken to take on the bus with him. My cousin didn't know anything about time or distance or road signs or maps. He just knew that by the time he got through that third chicken wing the bus should be pulling into Memphis. And if it wasn't, the driver better have a good explanation!

You can't trick my cousin. And he can't understand why President Nixon has so much trouble tricking those sophis-

ticated folks. He couldn't understand why Nixon had so much trouble explaining the tapes. My cousin said Nixon should have just told the court that Agnew erased them by mistake. Everybody would believe that explanation!

Moisture was used to create mud, which in turn was used to create man. But man became a soul brother only when God breathed the "breath of life" into his nostrils. I personally believe that air is the true source of life rather than either water or food. Air contains or creates the moisture necessary for life. For example, if you place a drinking glass in the open air on the table, moisture will collect on the outside of the glass and on the table.

I personally believe also that "breathatarianism," or living *only* on air, is the highest mode of human living and entirely possible under ideal conditions (similar to those described in the Garden of Eden). If the air is pure and unpolluted, as God created it, I believe human beings can live on air alone, without food or water, and that pure air will create the moisture necessary for human survival. I have gone for seven-day periods living on air alone, but I have always tried to get close to Eden-like conditions, like the Milk River Baths in Jamaica or Jalapa, Mexico.

God's using a rib to create woman makes one think the first couple must have been Black. Ribs have been a source of survival for Black folks for years!

But there's a real rub to the story of the rib. The rib is the supreme symbol of male chauvinism. It gives rise to the myth of male superiority and female dependency. If God had created both man and woman out of mud, they would have been created equal.

As the story stands, man gave woman both a rib and a name. Woman was dependent upon man for her very life, although man certainly wasn't willing to make much of a

sacrifice for his helpmeet. Adam wasn't man enough to give up something he would really miss--like a nose or a foot. And, as in marriage today, when a man gives a woman his name, he is really taking away her name. He is taking something away that belongs to her.

Or maybe the truth of the story is just the other way around. Maybe man was made from the rib of the woman and his real name was "Madam."

The rib spoils the story of the Garden of Eden in the same way male chauvinism mars the potential beauty of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence insisted that "all men are created equal." Of course, the signers of that document didn't really believe what they were endorsing because so many of them were slaveholders.

But the Declaration of Independence didn't even make a pretense about the equality of women. Sure enough, after a war was fought over the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence, and the United States Constitution was adopted, women didn't even have the right to vote!

But there *is* equality in creation for all babies, male and female, rich and poor. At the split second of birth, all babies are *created* equal. They have the same fears, the same needs, and the same dependencies. All babies are equally the recipients of the divine gift of life.

From that moment on, things begin to change. The equality of creation is wiped out. Rich babies receive better medical attention and hospital accommodations than poor babies. Boy babies are taught to reach for higher goals in life than girl babies. Most white babies enter a more comfortable home environment than Black babies. And so it goes.

The purity and innocence of the first couple is demonstrated by the fact that they were naked and unashamed. They realized that sex organs were natural parts of the body,

to be used for reproduction, and no less natural than fingers, toes, or any other functional part of the human anatomy. So Adam and Eve saw no need to wear clothes or to cover up.

Covering up results from a loss of innocence. Anytime folks know they are doing wrong, they always try to cover up. Anything folks know they have dirtied up, they want to hide. The hangman knows he is doing wrong by killing another human being. So he covers his face with a hood and makes believe his job is an honest living. The Ku Klux Klan knows it is dirtying up democracy and spreading filth throughout the land, so KKK members wear sheets and hoods.

Whenever government and law-enforcement officials want to violate individual rights by spying on folks, they employ undercover agents. When those agents get caught in their wrongdoing, it's called blowing their cover. And their employers won't even admit knowing them!

Whenever folks engage in malicious gossip, they know it is wrong. So they always begin by saying, "Let me tell you a secret!"

Many folks get upset over the sight of the naked human body and call it obscene or pornographic. They seem to realize how the human body and the act of sex have been dirtied up, and they don't want to see it and be reminded. Now the Supreme Court supports their right to forget.

Folks even get upset when they see animals engage in the natural act of reproduction, and they would never allow animals to do their thing on television. But behind the secrecy of closed doors, they will show stag movies of animals making it with animals, animals making it with humans, and every other combination.

Eating habits have dirtied up the body as much or more than sex habits. The fatter a person is, the more he or she has

polluted the body through bad eating habits. So fat folks try to cover up with double-breasted suits and vests, half-size dresses and corsets.

The Watergate cover-ups are another reminder of how so-called patriots in this country have abused the United States Constitution and tried to cover it up with the American flag. Pseudo-patriots have more loyalty to the flag than they have respect for the Constitution. Lots of folks are willing to die for the flag, but few are willing to lay down their lives to uphold the Constitution and the words of the Declaration of Independence.

Betsy Ross has more followers in America today than Thomas Jefferson! Perhaps that's retribution for saying "all *men* are created equal."

3
The Garden State

(Genesis 3:1-24)

Now the serpent was the slickest creature the Lord God had made. He was cunning, crafty, and cool. Snake was his name and pushin' was his game.

The serpent slunk up to Woman one day and said, "Dig, baby, let me ask you somethin'. Did The Boss lay down some rules about what y'all should eat?" And Woman answered, "We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'Don't eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. Don't even touch it, or you'll die.' "

But the serpent chided, "That's a whole lotta jive! You ain't gonna die. See, God knows when you eat the fruit of the Learning Tree, your head will be opened up and you'll be hip to the whole scheme. You'll be just like God, knowin' 'bout good and evil." And, like a good pusher, the serpent let the temptation lay there and pushed the point no further.

When Woman saw that the fruit of the tree looked good, smelled good, and felt good, she tried a bite. Woman said, "Oooooee! That's some mellow fruit. Let me lay some of this good stuff on my man." And she gave some to Adam, and he dug it too. It blew their minds! Their heads were opened up,

and they scoped everything in a new way. Like, for instance, they noticed for the first time they were both naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves.

Then they heard footsteps, and they knew it was the Lord God taking a walk in the garden during the cool of the day. Adam and his wife panicked and hid behind a tree. The Lord God called, "Aaaadam! Where are you?" Adam knew there was no point trying to play hide-and-seek with God, because the cards were stacked against you in that game! So Adam answered, "I heard you coming, Lord, so I hid because I was naked." And as soon as he said it, Adam knew he'd tripped himself up.

The Lord God began to cross-examine. "Who told you about nudity? There's only one way you could know about that. Did you eat some of the fruit I told you not to touch?" Adam knew he was trapped, so he squealed. And since there were only two folks at the time, it meant laying the rap on Woman. Adam said, "It's your fault in a way, Lord. You gave me Woman and she gave me the fruit and I . . . er . . . well, I ate!"

The Lord God turned to Woman and said, "Well, what about it?" Woman had no intention of taking the rap alone, so she said, "The devil made me do it, Lord. It was the lowdown snake called serpent. He tricked me, Lord, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the serpent, "I put a curse on you. From now on, you and all your kids will crawl on your belly and eat dust. Folks will hate you and step on your head, and you'll have to bite them to defend yourself." And the serpent stuck out his tongue a few times and slithered away.

To Woman, God said, "I've got a punishment for you too. I'm going to create labor pains and male chauvinism. In pain you will bring forth children, yet you will desire your husband and he shall rule over you."

And finally to Adam, God said, "Because you hearkened to the voice of your wife, here's your punishment. I'm going to create jobs. You're going to have to work for the rest of your life. I think I'll even go so far as to create money, and you'll have to sweat for bread from now on. I'm going to create thorns and thistles, which will give you a hard time when you try to plant. And you're going to have to eat radishes, I repeat, radishes, and sweet potatoes and things that grow in the ground. It will be that way 'til the day you die, because right now I'm decreeing death. You were made out of dust and to dust you will return." Those were God's ground rules, so to speak.

Then the Lord God made them some new clothes. And Adam called his wife Eve, or "living," because she was to be the first mother.

The Lord God had another thought. "Those two folks of mine have become like gods. They know now about good and evil. I created them in my own image, but I don't want it to get out of hand. Suppose they really turn on and eat of the tree of life and live forever?

Therefore the Lord God banished Adam from the Garden of Eden and set up security around the tree of life. God posted some angels in the east of the garden and put a spinning flaming sword in front of the tree.

God did so in the interests of immortal security.

Commentary

The practice of passing the blame to somebody else started all the way back in the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. If there had been any Black folks in the garden, the serpent would have blamed us.

Before so many hip young white kids appeared on the scene, we Black folks used to get blamed for everything. Older white folks even had nerve enough to blame slavery on us. Some white folks used to insist that their ancestors never went to Africa looking for slaves. They went there looking for diamonds, and Black folks just jumped aboard the ship and begged for a free ride back to America! And, in their benevolent way, the white folks asked, "Is there anything else we can do for you?" And the new Black passengers answered, "Yes, bwana! Put chains on our legs so we won't slip off the ship!"

Of all the witnesses in the Watergate hearings, my favorite was John Dean. He reminded me of myself when I was a kid. When I got caught stealing, I squealed on everybody. In my neighborhood stealing was serious business. Stealing was survival. Today it's more like a hobby, and they have clinical names for stealing, like kleptomania. A kleptomaniac goes into a store with four hundred dollars in his pocket and steals an earring. Then they send him to a psychiatrist, and he ends up paying the doctor more than the stuff he stole was worth.

In my neighborhood you had to choose up sides to steal, because you needed too much stuff to do it alone. How is one person going to steal a ton of coal? Nobody would choose me, because they knew if I got caught I was going to talk.

So I went out and got some white boys to steal with me. And we really had a good system. We'd all walk into a store, and the store detectives would be so busy watching me they didn't pay any attention to the white boys. And those white boys wiped them out!

But I had to give it up. The system worked all right, but those white boys just didn't steal anything us Black folks could use. We came out of a store one day, and my white partners had stolen forty-two cases of white business socks,

twelve pairs of skis, and ten cartons of flesh-colored Band-aids!

My tendency to talk when I got caught got me put out of the army. My third day in the army, the captain addressed the whole platoon and said, "If captured by the enemy, you are to give no information but your name, rank, and serial number. Is that clear?" I was the only one who answered, "No, sir!"

It just didn't make sense to me. The enemy could get my name, rank, and serial number from the dogtag around my neck. Which also means the enemy could get the same information if I was dead. I wanted something to negotiate with! As a matter of fact, I told the captain I planned to keep a note in my pocket with some secrets on it, just in case the enemy captured me while I was unconscious. I figured it would hold their interest until I regained consciousness and could tell them some more.

The captain told me I was a traitor. I told him, "I'd have been a traitor if I hadn't told you. But you can put it on my record right now that Dick Gregory is willing to die for his country, but if he gets caught he's talkin'!" The captain still wasn't satisfied, so I made a suggestion. If they only wanted me to give out my name, rank, and serial number, then that's all the army should teach me. Name, rank, and serial number—period!

When I think back, I'm really lucky they decided to throw me out. Suppose they had followed my suggestion and all I ever learned during my army training was name, rank, and serial number. Then, the first time I landed on the beach, I got caught. What do you suppose the enemy would have done when they asked me a question and I said, "Now I know you're not going to believe this, but . . . !"

The story of Adam and Eve is a very real reminder of the truth of the old saying, "You are what you eat!" When the

first couple ate the forbidden fruit, they lost their innocence and were banished from paradise. They let the serpent push them into going on an ego trip, and that trip has been the curse of humanity ever since.

The two most beautiful groups of human beings in the world are the very, very young and the very, very old. They both display an innocent wisdom and open love because neither the very young nor the very old are on an ego trip. They are not striving, scheming, and plotting to get ahead of someone else.

The story also suggests that what we put into our bodies affects us both mentally and physically. We often hear people say that "disease runs in the family." But they forget that diet and eating habits also run in the family.

It's so tragic that so many mothers unconsciously play the role of the serpent at the dinner table. They prepare the wrong foods (even if they serve vegetables they cook them to death), place their "burnt offering" in front of their children, and tempt them with rewards for eating it. And then they wonder why their children get sick. The average dinner table is the best possible illustration of the "sins of the parents being visited upon the third and fourth generations."

Parents suffer as much as their children from the negative attitudes and disease that result from improper diet. Parents have to deal with temper tantrums and doctor bills. And the medical services they pay for have about as much chance of curing disease as they do of "curing" darkness. When you turn on the light in a dark room, the darkness leaves. When you place the right foods in the body, disease also leaves. I can't help wondering if the modern "angels" guarding the tree of immortal life are not members of the American Medical Association!

In the United States today, folks have forsaken Mother

Nature's good earth, and the wide-open spaces, to huddle together in the cities. Ninety-eight per cent of the population lives on 2 per cent of the land, and 80 per cent lives within a 600-mile radius of Cleveland, Ohio.

Folks are lured to the cities by all kinds of temptations. They pursue their ego trip of searching for better jobs and more money. But along with financial promise, they find dope, crime, prostitution, and cops cooperating with graft and corruption.

Instead of pursuing a promise, folks find themselves pursuing a curse. They leave the good earth, with farms and gardens and freshly grown foods, to live in the dust of the city, where they are cursed with TV dinners, canned foods, bleached bread, and a steady diet of additives. Instead of the wide-open spaces and communion with Mother Nature, they find themselves afraid to step outside their homes and apartments. They purchase bigger and better locks to keep out intruders, forgetting that at the same time they are locking themselves tighter and tighter behind their own doors.

New Jersey calls itself the "Garden State." But anyone who has taken a whiff of the industrial odors spewing forth from New Jersey cities knows it is a far cry from paradise. The true garden state is within the grasp of everyone who will awaken from self-imposed banishment and start living according to the laws of nature. If eating a forbidden fruit brought on God's curse, returning to a diet of unforbidden fresh fruits and vegetables might bring God's blessing.

4
The First Hi-Rise

(Genesis 11:1-9)

Now at this time all the folks on earth spoke one language. There was no communication problem. And it came to pass, as folks began to travel east and explore the earth, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

And the folks said to each other, "This looks like a good place for a city. Let's burn some bricks and take some tar and build ourselves a skyscraper. Let's build the world's first hi-rise, so we can all stay together and not be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. Let's make it reach all the way up into the heavens."

And the Lord came down to visit the Heavenly Towers construction site and see what the folks were up to. And God said, "Behold, these folks of mine have really got it together. They're one people, speaking the same language, working together. If they can pull that hi-rise off, everything they imagine will be possible for them. There will be no humility."

So God thought up a scheme to halt construction. God said, "I'm going to bust their union. I'll mess up their lan-

guage, and they won't be able to understand one another's speech."

And that's just what God did, and it worked. The folks stopped building and scattered all over the face of the earth. The unfinished hi-rise was called Babel, because God used that project to create different languages.

It could just as well have been called Humble Plaza, because God also used the project to teach folks a lesson. Don't try to organize behind God's back!

Commentary

A "confusion of language" has always marked Black-and-white relationships in this country. White folks are always saying, "Those 'coloreds' sure do talk funny! We just can't understand them. Why can't they learn to speak standard English like us?" I learned my bad English grammar and dialect from a bad-talkin' Southern white boy!

When I came over on the slave ship from Africa, I was speaking pure Swahili. First thing I knew, a white boy came up to me and said, "Go ova' yonder an' brin' dat bale o' cawten ova' heah!" I thought he must be kidding, until I looked around and saw that big bullwhip in his hand. Then I learned to understand what he was saying mighty quick! I went across the levee and brought that bale of cotton over here. And sure enough, that's just what he wanted.

The difference between Black folks and white folks is that we Black folks have always been bilingual. We've always understood everything white folks were saying. Our survival depended upon it.

For example, white folks say "kill," and Black folks say "kilt." We know what "kill" means, but how many white

folks understand the word "kilt"? A hip white person might say "kilt" is "Scottish drag."

Let me explain the difference. If you hear a white person say, "I'm going to kill you," there's a possibility that he might shoot and miss. But if you hear a Black cat say, "Do that one more time an' you're gonna git kilt!"—there's no missin' behind that statement!

Or take the word "sandwich" and the word "sammitch." Everybody knows what a "sandwich" is. A "sandwich" is a little repast one eats to satisfy the appetite until dinner. But a "sammitch" *is* dinner. And if you knock a cat's sammitch out of his hand, you better start runnin' because you're gonna git kilt!

Of course, American white folks have confused the English language quite a bit themselves. If you don't believe it, just take a trip to England someday and hear what "standard English" is supposed to sound like.

In their confusion of the language, some white folks come up with other confused suggestions. Like teaching Black English to Black children in the schools! We already know Black English. If anyone needs to be taught Black English, it's white teachers who can't communicate with the Black kids they're supposed to be teaching.

White kids don't need to be taught Black English either; they pick it up on their own. The more hip white kids get, the more you hear them talking like Black folks; for example, asking each other "what's happenin'," "layin' down heavy raps," and "gittin' it together." But you never hear Black kids picking up white expressions like "goldarn," "golly," "gee whiz," "gosh," or (expletive deleted).

The confusion in the Tower of Babel story is on a deeper level than mere semantics. God caused confusion among humankind because they were organizing behind God's

back and leaving God out of their plans. They were trying to get it together on their own, without the spirit, presence, or will of God. Folks were trying to become little gods themselves.

We don't have to look very far for current examples of the same thing. Folks organizing, often over the issue of proposed construction, without giving any thought to God's priorities or what God wants. When folks decide to play "god" themselves, the result is always confusion, misunderstanding, and division.

God wants all folks to have decent housing. But God's will doesn't mean a thing when folks organize to keep out, or drive out, new Black neighbors in lily-white suburbs. Or when real-estate brokers organize "blockbusting" efforts against the first Black family that moves into a neighborhood. Or when some white folks organize to keep low-income public housing from being built in "their" neighborhood. Some folks in the Forest Hills (Queens) section of New York City got so upset over proposed low-income housing in their neighborhood that they rented buses and chased former Mayor John Lindsay all the way down to Miami, where he was campaigning in the Florida presidential primary.

Consider the current practices of many labor unions in these United States. What began as a magnificent grass roots movement to protect the rights of the workingman has become a citadel of exclusion for Blacks, Puerto Ricans, women, and other minorities. Surely, some unions have organized with no thought of God's priorities in mind.

When unions can become more concerned about overtime pay than about fair treatment and open membership, their confusion is certain to create division and discord. When union leaders can call a strike over the issue of a coffee

break and still refuse to break down the walls of discrimination in their own unions, they are living in an ivory Tower of Babel, and God can't be expected to bless their job actions.

When folks get together and organize, it can be a blessing or a curse, depending upon where God's priorities fit into the organization. Community organization can turn eyes, hearts, minds, and bodies toward heaven, or it can be a Tower of Babel.

Perhaps Caius Petronius said it best somewhere around 66 B.C.: "We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into a team, we would be reorganized. I was to learn in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress, while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization."

5
The Cain Mutiny

(Genesis 4:1-16).

After Adam and Eve streaked from the Garden of Eden, they discovered the advantages of nakedness. Eve conceived and bore a son named Cain, and later a brother for Cain named Abel. And Cain and Abel grew up together.

Abel became a shepherd, and Cain became a farmer. According to their religious custom, Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord. Abel brought his finest young sheep, and Cain brought some samples of the crops he had grown.

The offering Abel presented was accepted, but the Lord showed no regard for Cain's. When Cain saw his brother favored and himself rejected, his face fell and he was really mad.

The Lord spoke to Cain and said, "Why are you pouting? I only gave credit where credit was due. Look, if you do well, don't you think I will recognize a job well done? But, if you don't do well, something is wrong and you better check yourself out. Sin is waiting at your doorstep to trip you up, and you've got to overcome it."

But Cain stayed insanely jealous. He said to his brother

Abel, "Come on out into the field. I've got something I want to lay on you." Abel didn't realize how literally Cain was speaking.

And it came to pass out there in the field that Cain rose up and killed his brother Abel, his blood brother. Cain spilled his own blood!

Then Cain heard the voice of the Lord, "Where is Abel your brother?"

Cain answered, "How should I know? What am I, my brother's keeper?"

And the Lord said, "Do you know what you have done? I hear the voice of your brother's blood crying out to me from the ground. You are a condemned man, Cain, cursed from the very ground on which you stand. From now on, no matter how hard you try to till the soil, it will yield no crops for you. You are doomed to be a fugitive."

Cain was scared and cried out to the Lord, "Don't leave me! Don't do this to me! I can't earn a living. I can't even pray. Don't make me a marked man!" And the Lord said, "That's just what I'm going to do. But if anyone lays a hand on you, your attacker will be punished seven times over."

And the Lord put a mark on Cain. Having brought violence to the earth, Cain was to be immune from it himself. And Cain, the Father of Violence, wandered across the face of the earth. Wherever he walked, nations and individuals followed in his footsteps.

Commentary

Crime statistics show that most victims of murder in America are killed by relatives or so-called friends. When we add that fact to the tragic assassinations over the past dec-

ade, it's both *who* you know and *what* you know that can get you killed.

The relationship between Cain and Abel reminds us of the big difference between being "brothers" and being "friends." Brothers and sisters will do things to each other that friends would never do, or would not *dare* do and still remain friends.

For example, President Nixon put a tap on his own brother Donald's phone. He wanted to check out all his brother's business deals. But I have yet to read where President Nixon put a tap on his friend Bebe Rebozo's phone.

Of course, President Nixon even went so far as to put a tap on his own phone. How lonely can you get? I can just hear the President ordering his aides to rig up a phone tap. And they ask, "Whose phone?" The President answers, "Mine. I don't usually say anything that's significant. But I might one day, and I want it to be preserved for posterity!"

Think of how upset all the guests in the White House must have been to find out the phones were tapped. Sammy Davis, Jr., spent a night in the White House. And you *know* he probably used the phone. Wouldn't it be wild to play Sammy's tape and hear him phoning in his numbers for the next day?

The tapes I'd really like to hear are David Eisenhower's. I wouldn't be surprised if there are tapes of him phoning the North Pole to talk to Santa Claus. And he's so square he probably asked to speak to "Mr. Claus."

Think of how loosely the terms "brother" and "sister" are sometimes used. There are folks who will call you "brother" or "sister" while thinking of ways to rip you off.

On the other hand, friends must have a harmonious relationship with each other to remain friends. Brothers and sisters are not always harmonious, nor are they necessarily

friends. Friendship is a relationship that holds up when put to the test, when give-and-take, sacrifice, and trust are required. Friends live in harmony, while brothers and sisters might be at each other's throats. Jesus once described friendship with the words: "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14).

We are all born brothers and sisters in the sight of God. What is needed in America today, and the world over, is for us brothers and sisters to create a friendship with each other.

6
In and Out of Deep Water

(Genesis, Chapters 6-9)

Now it wasn't long before the whole earth was filled with violence. Folks had evil on their minds. It was an ugly scene, and everyone knows God don't like no ugly.

So God was very sad. God said, "I'm sorry I created folks in the first place. It looks like I made a big mistake. I'm going to blot out all the folks, and the beasts, and the birds, and the creeping things from the face of the ground."

But there was one man named Noah who caused God to have second thoughts. Noah was a good and blameless man, who walked with God and found grace in God's eyes. God felt Noah was old enough to be trusted. Noah was six hundred years old at the time. His last kid had been born one hundred years earlier.

God said to Noah, "Behold!" God often did that to get someone's attention. "Now don't panic," God continued, "but the end of the world is coming. I've decided to wipe it all out because there's so much violence.

"Now here's what I want you to do. Get yourself some gopher wood and some pitch and make yourself an ark.

Believe me, you're going to need it, because I'm going to bring down such a flood of waters like you've never seen. Everything under the heavens will be destroyed. All flesh that has the breath of life shall die.

"But with you I'm making a deal. After you finish the ark, get into it—you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives. The whole family. And into the ark with you, take one male and one female of every living thing. Just to be safe, you better take seven pairs of each. Don't forget to take along some food."

Then God gave Noah a blueprint for the ark. Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he. Which means, in simple language, Noah built the ark.

Two months later, on the seventeenth day of the second month as a matter of fact, God did send such a flood as you've never seen. It was like opening all the windows of the heavens. It rained forty days and forty nights. There was water in the basements, water in the gardens, water on the desert. The whole earth became a disaster area. Noah and his family were the only survivors.

After one hundred and fifty days God made a wind pass over the face of the earth, and the waters began to sink. The fountains of the deep were turned off, and the windows of the heavens were shut. Noah opened a window of the ark and sent a raven out to see if there was any dry ground around, then a dove—but no land.

Noah waited another seven days and sent the dove back out again. That night the dove came back, and lo (which means, would you believe?), she had an olive branch in her mouth. Noah knew there would be peace symbols one day.

And God said, "You can come out now, you and your family and all the animals and birds and creeping things and their families." Since all those pairs had been in the ark

over a year, quite naturally there were lots more of them now. And God said, "That's cool. Let them continue to be fruitful and multiply upon the earth."

Noah made a burnt offering on an altar.

God said, "Just as I have given you green plants for food, so now I give you every moving thing that lives. They will live in fear and dread of you. But don't eat flesh with its life and blood. For the shedding of lifeblood I will require a reckoning, both man and beast. Because I made folks in my own image, everyone who sheds the blood of folks, they too will be killed by other folks." God had in mind the future hunters, fishers, murderers, executioners, assassins, and armies.

Then God said to Noah privately, "Behold, I'm making a deal with you and all the folks who come after you. I'm never again going to wipe out everything with a flood. To remind you and me of the deal, I'm creating rainbows." And God did.

Commentary

The Great Flood came on the seventeenth day of the second month. Anyone who understands numerology knows that two is the number of the moon, and seventeen converts into eight (1 plus 7). Eight is the number of disaster. Numerologically speaking, the moon that governs tides and floods brought disaster. Doesn't that make you wonder about the floods that have followed America's moon shots?

Political leaders are always heralding the moon shots as a "great American effort." But that's not true, because most Americans don't understand the technicalities of space ex-

ploration. Only the astronauts and the staff at NASA understand. So it's a government enterprise rather than a national effort. It's a government enterprise that the American people are asked to *endorse* at the expense of money for food, housing, education, jobs, and other pressing social needs.

The world became a disaster area in Noah's time because of the violence and corruption among human beings. Folks brought on their own destruction. And we see the same pattern today. The actions of human beings bring on natural disasters.

Folks cut down trees and upset the balance of Nature. When Mother Nature is upset, her tears result in floods. Folks rape the soil, disregarding natural planting cycles and crop rotation in the quest for more profit. As a result, the soil becomes lifeless and unproductive; food shortages and famine follow.

Like Noah, those who are in tune with the natural ways of God understand what will surely happen as a consequence of such disregard for Nature. But when those who understand try to sound the warning, other folks think they're crazy!

The exhaust fumes from jet planes leave a residue high in the air that is slowly melting down the ice at the North Pole. One day there will be a shift in the balance between land and water that will wipe out the East Coast. Tell that to the average airline traveler (as he's running to make his flight), and he'll think you're crazy.

Or walk into the finest restaurant in town and start rapping to the customers about the worldwide famine that will also grip the United States, and you'll get thrown out on your prophecy. You might even get arrested.

Folks in tune with the ways of God have their own

reward. They know what is coming and can prepare for it, as Noah did in building the ark. Those who see the coming economic crash and famine in America are supplying themselves with dry foods and pure water. Since urban areas will be hit hardest by the coming disaster, some folks are already moving into rural areas, where they will be able to survive.

A recent *New York Times* item (May 5, 1974) reported that Mormons and other religious groups have been stockpiling food and other survival items. A Mormon spokesman said, "Now that we've gotten so far away from being self-sufficient, the threat of food shortages is real." About 40 per cent of the Mormon membership has stored up a year's supply of non-perishable food, fuel, clothing, and bedding in their garages, basements, and closets. So the Mormons must know something!

When folks got totally corrupt, God gave them a mass bath. The Great Flood is a reminder of the purifying properties of water. Both internally and externally, fresh pure water has marvelous curing effects. Bathing in mineral baths often produces miraculous cures. And drinking plenty of pure distilled water, water that is 100 per cent pure hydrogen and oxygen and unpolluted by added chemicals, is necessary to flush the toxins and poisons out of the body system.

Fresh fruits and vegetables and their juices are excellent sources of pure water. Nature distills the water in fruits and vegetables. In reminding Noah that green plants were for eating, God was really telling Noah to drink pure water, not blood! One of the best fruits for flushing out the body system is watermelon. Maybe that explains why Black folks have been able to survive all that greasy soul food.

As soon as the flood subsided, violence and killing came

right back, this time in the name of religion. Noah had been living all that time on the ark, with lions, tigers, and gorillas as roommates, and not one animal laid a paw on him. Then as soon as they got out onto dry land, Noah began killing animals for a burnt offering. No wonder they lived "in fear and dread" of him!

7

The Price of Being Famous

(Genesis, Chapters 12-17, 21-22)

There was a man named Abraham who had a special relationship with God. He was living in a place called Haran when God decided to be his agent. Abram, as he was known then, wasn't looking for an agent, of course, but God has a way of choosing folks without asking.

God said to him one day, "Come here, son. I'm going to make you famous. I'm going to look after you. I'll reward those who treat you well, and I'll curse those who do you harm. I'm going to make of you a great nation, and be like a mother and father to you.

"All you have to do is trust me. Now, I want you to leave your country, your kinfolks, and your home and go to a land I will point out to you."

So Abram took his wife, Sarai, and his nephew Lot, and all the people and possessions he had with him, and took off after God. When they got to Canaan, God said to Abram, "I'm going to give this land to your descendants." It sounded a little strange to Abram, because the land was occupied by the Canaanites at the time. Realizing he was on his way to the high regions of Bethel, Abram thought to himself, "I

guess it's best to trust your agent, especially when you're going to work the mountains."

Abram was seventy-five when God took him on as a client, and Sarai was ten years younger. Abram said, "Look, Lord. I know what you said. You're going to make me famous, and my descendants will be a great nation. But the simple truth is, I haven't got any kids. With no kids, no descendants!"

God said, "Look up in the sky. Count all the stars you see up there if you can. That's how numerous your descendants will be." And Abram thought to himself, "Promises, promises!"

Sarai, meanwhile, devised a scheme to help God out. Sarai had an Egyptian maid named Hagar who was considerably younger. So Sarai suggested to Abram that he try having a child by Hagar. Abram thought about it for ten years and finally decided there would be no harm in trying. And Hagar did conceive and bear a son, and Abram called the little boy Ishmael.

Thirteen years later God appeared to Abram again and said, "I am God Almighty, your agent. Remember me? Now it's time to talk about a contract. The terms of the contract are that I will give you all the land of Canaan, and make you the father of many nations, and bless your ancestors. On your part, you and all your descendants must be faithful to me, and obey my laws, and recognize me as your God. Agreed?"

Abram agreed, and God said, "Give me some skin." And the deal was closed.

"One more thing," God continued. "I'm going to change your name. From now on you're Abraham. It sounds better, and it goes well with Lincoln. And your wife shall be called Sarah from now on. Sarah will have a son, and you will name him Isaac. The contract was drawn up for Isaac, not

Ishmael. But I'm going to take care of Ishmael too. I'll make him father of twelve princes."

And it was just as God said. Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

After a few years God decided to test Abraham by enforcing the terms of the bargain. God called, "Abraham!"

Abraham answered, "Here I am, Lord. Where have you been?"

God said, "Never mind that. Remember, the contract says you're supposed to obey me? Take your son Isaac, whom you love most dearly, and go to the land of Moriah. When you get there, I will show you a mountain. I want you to offer your son Isaac on that mountain as a burnt offering."

Early the next morning Abraham got up, saddled his donkey, chopped some wood for the burnt offering, and set off for Moriah. After three days Abraham saw the mountain in the distance. Isaac picked up the wood, and the knife, and the materials to light the fire. But something was missing. Isaac said, "We've got the fire and the wood and the knife. But where is the lamb for the sacrifice?"

The question touched Abraham, and he was tempted to say, "Speaking!" But instead he said to his son, "God will take care of that."

When they came to the place God pointed out, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood. Then he tied up his son Isaac and laid him on the wood on the altar. Then Abraham picked up the knife and raised his trembling hand to kill his only son Isaac.

Just at that moment God, in the form of an angel, called to him, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

The angel said, "Freeze! Don't lay a hand on the kid or harm him in any way. I'm convinced. Now I know you truly fear God. You were willing to give up your only son to me."

Then Abraham saw a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. He offered the ram as a burnt offering in place of his

son. The ordeal left both his faith in God and his family intact.

Commentary

The history books tell us that the United States is a religious country, founded on the principle of religious freedom. I've always wondered which part of the Bible the first Pilgrims and explorers had in mind. I think it must have been this story of Abraham and Isaac.

God promised to make a great nation out of Abraham's descendants by giving them a land belonging to the Canaanites. The Pilgrims came to America seeking religious freedom and took over a country that belonged to the Indians. The first explorers had nerve enough to act like God gave them the land. They said, "We've discovered a New World." How do you "discover" a land that is not only occupied but already being used by someone else?

The pattern of Abraham and Isaac continued as the United States set out to establish itself as a great nation. The promise to be a great nation involved killing from the git go. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son because he was convinced God required it.

Throughout American history fathers have been willing to see their sons killed in the name of God and country. So-called patriotic fathers send their kids off to war because they believe "God is on our side." The late "father" Cardinal Spellman even placed a higher priority on the call of country than on the voice of God. In supporting the war in Vietnam he said, "It's my country, right or wrong!"

Notice I emphasized *fathers* being willing to see their sons killed in war. There's no indication in the story that Abraham asked Sarah for advice in obeying God's command. She

didn't have any say whatsoever, and it was *her* boy! Throughout America's war history mothers have been less inclined to mouth the patriotic rhetoric in sacrificing their sons than fathers have. It makes one believe there would be fewer wars if women were running the country instead of men.

There's a very dangerous implication in the story of Abraham and Isaac. The same dude who is willing to kill his own son because he hears a voice will also be willing to kill *my* son if he hears the same voice. A lot of Ku Klux Klanners are church-goin' folks. The same mentality that willingly sends sons off to war also supports the right of state police to shoot Black student demonstrators at Jackson State College in Mississippi.

Think of the hypocrisy involved in the father who's willing to sacrifice his son for his country but would be furious if his son turned out to be a draft dodger. That same father will burn his Christmas-tree lights during the energy crisis, buy black-market gasoline for his car, or cheat wherever he can on his income tax. The father is willing to sacrifice his son but not willing to inconvenience himself.

One final note on Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. There are a lot of church folks, both white and Black, who think it is a beautiful story. When they hear it read on Sunday morning they have tears in their eyes and they shout "Amen!" Those same folks, white and Black, make dirty little jokes about the "uncivilized" tribal practices in Africa. Child sacrifice, for example. Abraham would have been right at home.

8
Strangers and Other Lovers

(Genesis 18:20-19:29)

Then God said, "I've heard good folks complaining about Sodom and Gomorrah. They say sin is very grave in those two towns. I'm going down to see for myself. If the sin isn't as bad as the outcry, I'll know." But if they lived up to their reputation, God planned to destroy the towns.

Now Abraham knew what God had on his mind. Abraham said to God, "Are you going to destroy the good with the bad? That's not like you, Lord. Just suppose there are fifty righteous folks in the town?"

God said, "Look, I'm not unreasonable. If I find fifty good folks at Sodom I'll call off the whole thing."

So Abraham said, "Suppose five folks out of the fifty turned out to be rotten? Would you go ahead and destroy the town because five folks were found lacking?"

And God said, "No, if I find forty-five good folks I'll spare the town."

"Forty?"

"All right, forty."

"Thirty?"

"Yes."

"Twenty?"

"Even twenty!"

Then Abraham said, "Now don't get mad, Lord. This is the last time I'll speak. Suppose you found only ten good folks?"

God answered, "For the sake of even ten righteous folks I will not destroy the town."

That night two angels came to Sodom and found a man named Lot sitting at the gate. Now Lot had been living in Sodom for some time and knew all about the place. Lot said, "Turn back, my lords, I beg you. These aren't your type of folks."

But the two angels refused. Lot brought the two men to his house. He baked some unleavened bread and laid out a real friendly spread.

Before the two visitors went to bed, the men of Sodom came and surrounded Lot's house and chanted, "Lot, Lot, what've you got? Who came to you tonight? Bring them out so we can get to know them a little better."

Lot said, "Don't carry on like that, I beg you. Look, I've got two eligible daughters. I'll give them to you, and you can have your will. But leave these two strangers alone. They're guests under my roof." In those days you were better off being a guest than a daughter.

But the men of Sodom said, "Will you listen to him? This cat's a newcomer in town himself. Just passing through. Now all of a sudden he's going to judge us! You better check yourself out, Lot. We'll give it to you worse than we will them."

And with that the men of Sodom rushed the door. But Lot's visitors snatched Lot back inside the house and bolted the door. Then they struck the men of Sodom with blindness. The men of Sodom groped around trying to find the door and finally got tired and gave up.

Lot's guests told him who they were and why they had come to Sodom. "There's been a real public outcry against this town. God sent us here to destroy it. Now, you and everybody close to you must get out of town. You've got until sunrise."

Lot told his future sons-in-law, "Get up. We've got to split, because God is about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah." But they thought he was kidding and went back to sleep.

When morning came the two angels said to Lot, "You haven't got much time. Take your wife and two daughters and get out of here." When Lot didn't move fast enough, the angels carried them all outside the town. "Run for the hills, Lot. Don't stop in the valley, and don't look back or you'll be wiped out! For God's sake hurry, Lot, because we can't start destroying until you are safe."

So Lot and his family made haste. And God rained fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah. But, contrary to instructions, Lot's wife looked back to see what was happening. And immediately she became a pillar in the community. As a pillar, Lot's wife found out when God's judgment rains, it pours.

Commentary

There are two bum raps associated with this story. Both are sexist, one male chauvinist, one a slander against homosexuals.

Popular interpretation of the story in the church insists that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt because she *disobeyed* God's command. She turned around and looked back. And for that disobedience she took quite a licking.

Poor Lot's wife was a victim of male chauvinism if there

ever was one. She's known only as "Lot's wife," as though her only identity was as a possession of Lot—that is, Lot's house, Lot's cattle, Lot's riches. Lot and his wife weren't running away side by side, or hand in hand, as equals. Instead, Lot's wife followed behind the proper and respectful number of paces dictated by tradition in her male-dominated society.

But the worst is that chauvinism probably caused her death; God's messengers told Lot, and *only him,* not to look back at the destruction of Sodom! The story doesn't indicate that Lot's wife got the same message or even that Lot told her. Which puts a different light on the whole episode, doesn't it? We know what kind of "family man" Lot was. Any cat who would offer his daughters to a crowd of potential rapists just might decide to off his wife.

What better way for Lot to do in his wife than to let God do it for him? It would completely take the rap off himself. All Lot had to do was neglect to pass on what would happen if she looked back. Lot could be reasonably sure his wife *would* look back at all that fire and brimstone.

Seen in this light, the point of the story is turned around. The *obedience* of Lot's wife is what really did her in.

The anti-gay interpretation of the story says that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their "sin" of homosexuality—"sodomy," that is.

The idea that the men of Sodom had homosexual designs on the guests in Lot's house comes from the Hebrew word translated into English as "know." The men of Sodom demanded that Lot bring out his two guests because they wanted to *know* them better. The word "know" is often used in the Old Testament to mean "sexual intercourse," or the kind of intimate knowledge that comes only through sexual intercourse, but this is by no means the *only* way the word is used.

The vigilante group, which turned out to be a lynch mob, consisted of the "men of Sodom." Hanging folks was men's work. Like instant frontier justice in western movies. And if Lot thought he was bribing an all-male gay crowd, he would hardly have offered his *daughters* as a bribe.

The Old Testament books of Isaiah and Ezekiel give us a clue to what "sodomy" really was. Isaiah said Sodom's grave sin (along with Gomorrah) was of hypocrisy, oppression, neglect of the poor, and faulty administration of justice. Isaiah (1:10 ff.) says, in effect, "Now hear this, rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah! God won't listen to any of your prayers, or accept your burnt offerings, or acknowledge your religious holidays, unless you come clean. Stop doing evil and do good. Seek justice and correct oppression. Defend the neglected and the outcasts, like orphans, bastards, and widows."

Ezekiel (16:49) follows along the same line, saying that Sodom was living in ease and abundance, wasting food and proudly flaunting excesses, while at the same time refusing aid to the poor and needy. Sodomy, as Ezekiel describes it, is very much like "benign neglect."

According to the laws in most states in the United States today, sodomy is an "unnatural act" or a "crime against nature." The real crimes against Nature, the truly unnatural acts from the Biblical point of view, are injustice, oppression, and neglect of the poor.

When a president mocks the memory of a departed predecessor by paraphrasing in his inaugural address, "Ask not what your government can do for you, but what you can do for yourself," then compounds the mockery by abolishing the poverty program—that's an act of sodomy!

When old folks in this country find themselves so abandoned by human concern and so bereft of alternatives that they must shoplift or starve, they have been sodomized.

When native American Indians are locked on reservations, their land long since having been stolen, their treaties unrecognized, their children massacred by disease and poverty and suicide, it is a crime against Nature.

When Mexican American workers who cultivate the vineyards are crushed in the vise of poverty, like the grapes they pick, it is an unnatural act.

When official government statistics report that a million white folks escaped poverty in 1972, while the number of Black poor increased by three hundred thousand, it calls down the wrath of God.

The words of the prophet Isaiah cry out for a hearing:

> Come now, let us reason together,
> says the Lord:
> though your sins are like scarlet,
> they shall be white as snow;
> though they are red like crimson,
> they shall become like wool.
> If you are willing and obedient,
> you shall eat the good of the land;
> But if you refuse and rebel,
> you shall be devoured by the sword;
> for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.
> (Isaiah 1:18-20)

Isaiah is trying to tell us something.

9
The ABC's of Slavery

A. Dealing with the Dreamer

(Genesis, Chapter 37)

Joseph was one of many brothers and half-brothers. But because Joseph had been born in Jacob's old age, he was the favorite of his father. Jacob was always doing things for Joseph, dressing him up in boss threads and fine vines. For example, he gave Joseph a long-sleeved coat of many different colors, a style that was really in at the time.

Joseph's brothers couldn't stand him. They thought he was a spoiled brat, a tattletale, and Daddy's little pet. Of course, Joseph brought much of the hatred on himself. For example, he just couldn't resist telling his dreams to his brothers.

The morning after one dream Joseph greeted his brothers, "Hi, guys. Let me tell you about this dream I had last night. We were all out in the field binding up the grain into sheaves, and all of a sudden my sheaf stood up straight. And then all of your sheaves gathered around my sheaf and bowed down to it like it was a king or something. Isn't that odd?"

His brothers protested, "What're you trying to tell us,

little Joe? That you will be our king one day and we'll have to bow down to you?" And the brothers hated Joseph all the more.

But Joseph didn't know when to quit. The very next morning he said, "I had another dream last night. It must have something to do with my sign. The sun and the moon and eleven stars all came and bowed to me." His brothers grumbled. "This kid's really getting out of hand. He thinks the whole solar system revolves around him!"

But Joseph paid them no mind and skipped off, saying, "I think I'll tell my dream to Dad. He'll love it." But Jacob scolded Joseph, saying, "You're getting too big for your britches, boy! I don't want to hear any more talk about things bowing down to you."

Now Joseph's brothers were tending their father's sheep far away from home. And Jacob sent Joseph out, saying, "Go see how your brothers and the flock are doing. And for God's sake, and your own, no dream talk!"

His brothers saw him coming, and one said, "Dig, bro's. Here comes the Beautiful Dreamer! You know, now's the perfect chance to do him in. We could kill him, toss him into an empty cistern, and say an animal ate him." But brother Reuben said, "Let's don't kill him. Just throw him into the cistern. He won't be able to get out." Because Reuben planned to come back and rescue Joseph.

When Joseph arrived, the brothers stripped his coat off and pushed him into a cistern. As they ate lunch afterward they saw a caravan of traders off in the distance. Brother Judah said to the others, "Why don't we make some money out of this deal? Let's sell them Joseph!"

So they sold Joseph for twenty shekels of silver, and the traders took Joseph with them to Egypt. The brothers killed a goat, and dipped Joseph's coat of many colors in the blood of the goat, and headed home. They showed the bloody coat

to Jacob and said, "We hate to alarm you, Dad, but did you by any chance send Joseph out to look for us? We found this coat on our way home, and it sure looks like the one you gave him."

Jacob said, "It *is* Joseph's. No doubt about it. A wild beast has torn my son to pieces and eaten him." And Jacob likewise tore his own clothes to pieces and went into mourning and refused to be comforted.

Meanwhile, back in Egypt, the traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. The dreamer was about to start a new career in the court of Pharaoh.

But that's another story.

B. The Butler, the Baker and the Captain's Wife

(Genesis, Chapters 39-40)

Potiphar recognized that Joseph was under Divine Guidance, and he made Joseph the overseer of the entire household. Joseph was the butler-in-charge, and he knew more about Potiphar's house and Potiphar's affairs than Potiphar did himself. All Potiphar had to do was eat the food Joseph put on the table.

Now Joseph was divine not only in guidance but also in looks. He was so handsome that Potiphar's wife found him

irresistible. It wasn't like her to beat around the bush, so she came to Joseph every day and said, "Come on, let's do it!"

The first time Joseph was horrified. He said to the woman, "Your husband *trusts* me. He puts everything he has in my hands. But that doesn't include you. You're his wife! It would be a double wrong to go to bed with you—a sin against both my earthly and my Heavenly Master."

But Potiphar's wife wouldn't take "no" for an answer. One day she grabbed Joseph's cloak and tried to drag him into the bedroom. Joseph slipped out of the cloak and left Potiphar's wife holding the goods.

She was boiling mad, and her desire changed to hate. She said to herself, "I'll fix that uppity slave!" So when Potiphar came home that night his wife cried, "That slave of yours—Joseph—tried to rape me! He dragged me into the bedroom with a wild look in his eyes. He was just like an animal. I screamed and he ran, but he left his cloak behind. Here's the evidence."

Potiphar called Joseph to him and said, "Is this the thanks I get for all I've done for you? I should have known you people are all alike. You just can't keep your hands off a gentile lady!" And Potiphar had Joseph thrown into prison.

Even in prison God did not desert Joseph. The warden recognized the same qualities in Joseph that Potiphar had seen, and he made Joseph prisoner-in-charge. It was part of the Pharaoh's new penal reform program to give prisoners themselves more personal responsibility.

Some time later Pharaoh got mad with his chief butler and his chief baker and threw them both in jail. Joseph got to know the butler and baker pretty good. One morning he noticed they were down in the mouth. Joseph said, "What's the matter?" And they answered, "We both had strange dreams last night. But we don't know anyone around here who can tell us what the dreams mean. Back in Pharaoh's

court, he's got all kinds of wizards and astrologers who could give us a reading."

Joseph answered, "God only knows what your dreams mean, and I mean that quite literally. Tell your dreams to me, and I'll see if I can help. I used to give readings myself when I was young."

So the chief butler said, "Well, in my dream I saw a vine. It had three branches. And right before my eyes it blossomed, and clusters of grapes appeared. I had Pharaoh's cup in my hand for some reason, and I crushed the grapes into the cup and gave it to Pharaoh to drink. Can you make anything out of that?"

Joseph said, "The branches represent days. In three days you will be released from prison and you'll have your old job back." Then Joseph added, "When it happens, do me a favor. Tell Pharaoh about me, that I am completely innocent of the charges against me."

The baker also told his dream to Joseph. "In my dream I had three baskets of baked goods on my head, and I was carrying them to Pharaoh. But birds were eating out of the top basket. What do you make of that?"

Joseph said, "You're not going to like this. The baskets also represent days. In three days Pharaoh will cut off your head and hang your body on a tree. And the vultures will come and tear off your flesh."

Sure enough, three days later Pharaoh called in the butler and the baker for sentencing. It was just as Joseph had predicted. The baker lost his head and the butler got his job back.

But the butler forgot to mention Joseph to Pharaoh.

C. Feast and Famine

(Genesis, Chapter 41)

And it came to pass after two years, Pharaoh was standing on the bank of the river Nile. And behold, seven cows, fat and sleek, well fed and well groomed, came walking up out of the river and began grazing! And behold, seven other cows, skinny, hungry, and gaunt, with all their ribs sticking out, also came up out of the river, and they too began grazing—on the fat cows! The skinny cows ate up the fat cows.

Pharaoh awoke with a start and realized he had been dreaming. Pretty soon Pharaoh fell back to sleep, and behold, he started dreaming again! This time seven ears of corn, very fat and juicy, were growing on a stalk. Right beside them, seven thin and scorched ears sprouted up. And the skinny ears swallowed up the fat ones.

Again Pharaoh awoke, and this time his spirit was troubled. The two dreams couldn't be a coincidence. So he sent for all the magicians and wise men in Egypt and told them his dreams, but not one man could interpret them.

All of a sudden the chief butler remembered Joseph. He said to Pharaoh, "Remember when you sent the baker and me to prison a couple of years ago? A young Hebrew was in jail with us—he's still there as a matter of fact—and he was good at interpreting dreams. The baker and I told our dreams to him, and he told us *exactly* what would happen.

He said I'd get my job back and that you'd hang the baker."

Then Pharaoh sent word to the prison to bring Joseph to him immediately. When Joseph had showered, shaved, and changed his clothes, he was brought before Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "They tell me you can interpret dreams."

Joseph answered, "No, but God can. I'm only the medium. God will interpret Pharaoh's dreams correctly."

So Pharaoh told his two dreams to Joseph. When he had finished, Joseph said, "The two dreams have the same meaning. *Two* dreams with the same meaning is God's way of saying it is definite."

Then Joseph gave the interpretation. "Both the cows and the ears of corn represent years. The fat cows and the full ears mean there will be seven years of plenty in Egypt. The skinny cows and the scrawny ears mean that after the seven years of plentiful crops, seven years of famine will consume the land. It will be such a disaster that the years of plenty will be wiped out and forgotten.

"Therefore, let me offer a suggestion. If I were you, I'd appoint a very wise Secretary of Agriculture, a good administrator who is careful in all details. I'd also start a food conservation program. Start amassing a surplus to be used for the food shortage that is sure to come. Let Pharaoh appoint overseers throughout the land, who will set aside one-fifth of the produce during the next seven years. And one more very important thing. Don't make any wheat deals for the next seven years!"

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I like it. And since you are wise and discreet, and it is obvious the Spirit of God is with you, I hereby appoint you Secretary of Agriculture. For the next fourteen years it will be the most important post in my administration, second only to the throne of Pharaoh himself. In effect, you will rule over the land."

Pharaoh took his ring, with the seal of the kingdom on it,

and placed it on Joseph's finger. He dressed Joseph in royal robes and fine linens and put a gold chain around his neck. And Joseph was given the second chariot behind Pharaoh, and wherever he rode, people got down on their knees before him. So Joseph did his Charlton Heston bit throughout the land of Egypt.

And Joseph put his conservation program into effect. In every city food from the surrounding fields was stored up. And the food surplus became as abundant as the sand around the sea. For seven years the crops were plentiful.

Then the famine came. There was no food in all the earth, except in the land of Egypt. The people cried out in their hunger to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh said, "Go see Joseph, and do whatever he says." So the people came to Joseph, and he opened the storehouses and sold the surplus food. And the people came from all the surrounding lands to buy grain, because Egypt alone had food.

And Joseph said to Pharaoh one day, "Good business just requires patience. I knew we'd get a good wheat deal if we had sense enough to wait seven years."

Commentary

Joseph found out it's dangerous to be a dreamer. Just like Joseph's brothers, society today has three ways of dealing with dreamers. Kill the dreamer. Throw the dreamer in jail (the contemporary "cisterns" in our society). Or sell the dreamer into slavery; purchase the dream with foundation grants or government deals, until the dreamer becomes enslaved to controlling financial or governmental interests. Society tries to buy off the dream and lull the dreamer to sleep. It's called a "lull-a-buy."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a dreamer. At the 1963

March on Washington he stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and eloquently described his dream for America. And Dr. King experienced all the ways society tries to deal with dreamers. He was certainly no stranger to jails all over the country. He was frequently sought out by those in power who were trying to arrange deals and compromises.

But Dr. King continued to dream through incarceration and temptation. He spoke out against the war in Vietnam. He set up headquarters in the slums and ghettos of Chicago, trying to share his dream with the urban poor. In 1968 he announced another March on Washington, the Poor People's Campaign, which resulted in the erection of Resurrection City on the mall between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial.

Then Dr. King went to Memphis, Tennessee, to stand at the side of struggling sanitation workers. While he was there he was shot down and killed on a motel balcony. He became a martyred victim of society's most extreme method of dealing with dreamers. But it doesn't work. Dreamers can be killed. Dreams live on.

Joseph's experiences as a slave were quite similar to those of Black slaves in the United States. The setting of the story is a reminder that the origins of the Black slave trade were in the Arab world. In his book *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture,* David Brion Davis writes:

> Racial distinctions were more important in the Arab world and Mameluke Egypt, where Negro slaves were far more numerous than in the Roman Empire. Although Moslem jurists regarded slavery as an unnatural condition that could be justified by only exceptional circumstances, they tended to relax their standards as Arab traders moved into the interior of Africa and returned with increasing numbers of Negroes. Moslems not only accepted the legitimacy of Negro enslavement, but were inclined to think of black Africans as a docile race who were born to be slaves.

Maybe Joseph was a Black cat. That would certainly explain his taste in clothes and the wild colors he wore.

Joseph became a "house slave" in the home of Captain Potiphar. And his role was the same as that of Black slaves and servants in so many white homes in the United States. Joseph had charge of all Potiphar's affairs, from cooking to bookkeeping. Potiphar became *completely dependent* upon Joseph. So who was the real slave, Joseph or Potiphar?

Over the years many white folks have been completely dependent upon the services of their Black slaves and servants. Black folks managed the white household, raised the white kids, and placed the food on the table for white folks to eat. Many white households just couldn't function without Black input. Webster's dictionary defines *slave* as "one whose person and services are under the control of another." So who's the slave to whom?

It's a testimony to Black compassion and moral values that a well-planned poison campaign never was conceived among those Black slaves or servants who cooked the white folks' food and placed it on the table.

Joseph became the innocent victim of the slavemaster mentality. Joseph rejected the advances of Potiphar's wife, and she decided to get even. Joseph was merely trying to be a good slave who knew his place. When Potiphar got home he believed his wife rather than his slave and got so fired up that he threw Joseph in jail.

The story has been played out over and over again in the lives of Black folks. Many Black men have been falsely accused of making advances toward white women. All-white juries have condemned innocent Black victims to jail and even execution. Sometimes the Ku Klux Klan got so fired up they executed their own version of "instant justice"—lynching!

The butler in the Joseph story symbolizes America's

treatment of Black folks. The butler used Joseph's talent as an interpreter of dreams and he promised to tell Pharaoh about Joseph. As soon as the butler got himself comfortably back in Pharaoh's palace, he forgot all about his word to Joseph.

America was built on the sweat, toil, and talent of Black folks. But when the work was done and the talent utilized, America quickly forgot its debt to Blacks. Black folks helped lay down the railroad tracks, but they could only work as porters after the trains started running. Black slaves picked the cotton, but the garment industry belonged to white folks.

If President Nixon had had Joseph in his cabinet, he probably wouldn't have made that bad wheat deal with Russia. When Leonid Brezhnev visited the United States last year, I finally realized how President Nixon must have gotten tricked into that wheat deal. Every time I turned on television I saw Nixon and Brezhnev drinking together. I can understand two world leaders sipping a ceremonial toast together. But a toast shouldn't start at eight o'clock in the morning and last until midnight! Nixon and Brezhnev did so much drinking, when I turned on the six o'clock news I thought I'd accidentally tuned in the Dean Martin show.

Of course, if Brezhnev had been clever he could have gotten all our soy beans too. All he would have had to do is whisper in Nixon's ear, "Dick, you give me all your soy beans, and before I leave I'll get on national television and say John Dean is a Russian spy."

It's sad to realize that the United States government is more interested in making a wheat deal with the Russians behind closed doors than it is in seeing that hungry people at home and abroad get a fair deal at the dinner table. The United States paid a high price for being selfish and secretive in the Russian wheat deal. Since the deal was made, the

United States dollar has been devalued 10 per cent. So the United States loses a hundred million dollars on the billion-dollar payment.

Now wheat is so scarce here at home folks are talking about bread going up to a dollar a loaf. How much better it would be for America if our shortage at home resulted from our freely sharing wheat with starving people the world over! The respect and admiration for the United States in the eyes of the world would be worth more than any financial transaction with Russia.

If Joseph were Secretary of Agriculture today, he would be able to see the signs of the times. He would know that famine is Nature's way of pruning the earth. After the famine is over, the earth becomes more productive than before. And a period of abundance is Nature's way of warning that famine is on its way—that is, the fat cows and the fat ears of corn.

If Joseph saw all the fat, overweight folks in the United States today, how do you suppose he might interpret that vision?

10
Up the River and into a Foster Home

(Exodus 1:8-2:10)

Many years later there arose in the land of Egypt a Pharaoh who knew nothing of the story of Joseph. All he knew was there were a whole lot of Hebrews in Egypt, and he saw them as a threat. So Pharaoh set out to avoid a Middle East crisis.

Pharaoh said to his people, "Behold, there's a lot of Jews around here, and there's strength in numbers! If they ever sided with the enemy in war, we'd be in tough shape. We've got to do something, but we've got to be clever. Let's say we're opening the building-trades unions to Hebrew apprentices, but we'll really be making them slaves."

Pharaoh appointed strict taskmasters over the people of Israel, and they afflicted them with heavy burdens. The slaves were forced to lay the bricks, and build cities, and work in the fields. Their lives were made bitter with bricks and mortar. But the more the people of Israel were oppressed, the more they multiplied throughout the land.

So Pharaoh devised a genocide plan to check the Hebrew population growth. He commanded the Hebrew midwives

to practice after-the-fact birth control by killing all Hebrew boy babies. But the midwives feared God and refused to obey Pharaoh's command. When Pharaoh demanded an explanation, the midwives said, "Jewish mothers are something special. They deliver their own kids with no help."

So Pharaoh issued a decree that all male Hebrew babies must be thrown into the river Nile. One clever Jewish mother obeyed the command, but she put her little baby boy into a basket. The basket floated on the Nile and came to rest in some reeds near the exact spot where Pharaoh's daughter took her daily bath.

Pharaoh's daughter spotted the basket and sent her servant to fetch it for her. When she opened the basket she cried, "Why, it's a little Jewish baby! He's so cute I think I'll keep him." And she named the baby "Moses," which means "son" in Egyptian and "drawn out" in Hebrew. Pharaoh's daughter had drawn an adopted son out of the river Nile. And Moses became a kept child in the house of Pharaoh, and he grew up passing for Egyptian.

Pharaoh's genocide scheme didn't work.

Commentary

The American slave-trader was just the opposite of Pharaoh's daughter. Pharaoh's daughter took the slave baby Moses ***out of the water*** to give him freedom. The American slave-trader put Black folks ***into the water*** to make them slaves. Moses floated to freedom in a basket. Blacks floated into slavery locked in the miserable holds of slave ships.

Pharaoh's genocide plan was a lot more up front than

many of the genocidal schemes practiced against Blacks and other minorities today. Today it's called "birth control."

Personally, I've never trusted anything white folks tried to give us with the word "control" in it. Anything good with the word "control" in it, white folks don't want us to have. As soon as we started talking about *community control,* some white folks went crazy.

Since birth control is against Nature, human beings are the only creatures in God's creation who would ever consider developing birth-control pills. You mention contraception to a gorilla and he will tear your head off!

One of the definitions of *genocide* is "imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group." Government programs for poor Black folks that emphasize birth control, sterilization, and abortion availability obviously fit into that category.

But there's also a more subtle strain of genocide in the background. Black people are herded into small, overcrowded areas called ghettos, made to live in substandard housing where heat, water, and plumbing facilities are lacking and adequate public services like garbage removal are withheld, making the ghetto areas breeding grounds for rats, disease, and death. Add to this the poor food found in ghetto supermarkets, the absence of health services, and the fires that consume the rundown houses and the little kids who live in them.

The result is an infant mortality rate that is at least twice as high for Black folks as it is for white folks. The same pattern is true for Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and Indians. The combination of birth control, abortion, and infant mortality produces a genocide plan a lot more subtle than Pharaoh's.

I've been told of a place in Chicago where as many as a hundred and twenty-five Black mothers a day are given abortions. If that happened every day for a year, the potential Black population would be reduced by more than forty-five thousand—in one clinic alone!

Moses floated out of Pharaoh's genocide scheme. A remnant seems to survive even the most vicious forms of genocide. In spite of the genocide practiced against Black folks over the years, Black genius has survived—a Martin Luther King, a Malcolm X, a Frederick Douglass, a Charles Drew, a Ralph Bunche, and so many, many more.

Imagine the Black genius that would have been available to America if genocide was not the practice!

11
A Talking Bush! Hot Stuff!

(Exodus, Chapters 2-4)

Moses ended up in the land of Midian, tending sheep for his father-in-law Jethro. Moses had split from Egypt with a murder rap hanging over his head.

A funny thing happened to Moses on the way to Mount Horeb with his flocks. He saw a bush that was clearly on fire, but the flames were not consuming it. It was just a burning bush! Moses said to himself, "I got to see that closer. Why ain't that bush an ash?"

All of a sudden Moses heard a voice calling, "Moses! Moses!" The voice seemed to be coming out of the bush. Moses answered, "Here am I!"

The bush said, "Don't stand too close. And take off your shoes. You're standing on holy ground. You're talking to none other than God!" Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

God said, "I've heard the cries of my people in Egypt, and I see their sufferings. I'm going to set them free, and I need your help. I want you to confront Pharaoh and lead my people out of Egypt."

Moses was flabbergasted and said, "Why me? I ain't no leader!"

And God answered, "Because I said so."

Moses stammered, "That sounds good to me and you. But what if they say, 'Who sent you?' "

God answered, "I AM WHO I AM. Tell them I AM sent you!"

Moses said, "IYAM? Wouldn't GOD sound better?"

God answered, "I said, I . . . AM! Besides, I'm going to show you some tricks that will have them eating out of the palm of your hand. What's that you have there?"

Moses said, "A rod."

God said, "Throw it on the ground."

And when Moses did as he was told it turned into a snake. Moses took one look at the snake and split.

God said, "Come back here. Pick up that snake by the tail."

Scared as Moses was, he was more scared of God. So he picked up the snake by the tail. And behold, it turned back into a rod!

God said, "I'll show you another one. Put your hand into your bosom." Moses did as he was told. "Now pull it out." When Moses pulled out his hand it was white as snow, like he had leprosy!

"Now put your hand back into your bosom and pull it out again." Moses followed orders, and his hand was back to normal.

Then God said, "If those two tricks don't convince them, I'll show you others. Like my famous water-to-blood trick."

Moses was still trying to think of excuses. He said, "Please, God, or Iyam, send somebody else. I can't talk too good. I git tongue-tied."

God was getting fed up with excuses. God said, "Who do you think *created* tongues, and mouths, and talking, and hearing, and seeing? I did! Why are you so worried, since I'll

be with you every minute? If it will make you feel better, I'll send your brother Aaron along. You know he's a good talker. I'll tell you what to say, you tell it to Aaron, and let him put it in his own words. Now get going, and don't forget your magic rod."

Moses and Aaron gathered the people of Israel together. Aaron laid down a mellow rap. He said to the people, "You gotta believe!" And they believed. They were sure God had seen their suffering and was about to do something really big.

Commentary

It's not uncommon for the voice of God to be heard behind the crackling flames of fire. As American bombs rained terror in Vietnam, and villages were consumed by flames and little children with them, young folks in America heard the voice of God calling attention to the suffering, and they took to the streets in protest. The streets and campuses where those dedicated youth marched became holy ground.

During many long, hot summers, urban ghettos in America were consumed by flames of anger, frustration, and protest. Those whose ears were morally sensitive could hear the voice of God saying, "I have seen the suffering of my people, and it must be relieved." And they continue to struggle for liberation and human dignity until God's will is finally realized.

Folks who live by the laws of Nature, who truly respect and appreciate God's handiwork, also hear God's voice in the beauty of autumn, when the leaves turn to flame, or in the fiery beauty of a sunset. They know that all of God's creation, including their own bodies, is holy ground.

12
Let My People Go!

(Exodus, Chapters 5-15)

Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh and said, "The God of Israel, Who goes by the name of Lord, says you should let the Hebrew people go."

At first Pharaoh couldn't believe what he was hearing. Then Pharaoh answered, "I don't know any God Israel! And I certainly don't intend to let your people go. You already outnumber us, and you want me to set you free? Go down, Moses!"

Then Pharaoh ordered the taskmasters, "Because these Hebrew slaves got so uppity through their so-called leaders Moses and Aaron, don't give 'em any more straw to make bricks with. Let 'em find their own straw. But make sure they don't slack off on the number of bricks produced. That ought to keep their minds off freedom!"

At the end of the day the taskmasters whipped the Hebrew foremen because they didn't turn out the required number. The foremen realized Pharaoh meant business, so they went to Moses and Aaron and said, "Why didn't you

guys let bad enough alone? We hope God gets you for this, Moses and Aaron!"

So Moses turned to God and said, "Why did you put me in this trick? And why are you doing this to your people?"

God answered, "Just don't forget Who I Am, and the promises I made to your ancestors. I'm going to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and give them a land of their own."

God told Moses to confront Pharaoh again, demanding the release of the Hebrew people. Aaron threw the magic rod on the ground in front of Pharaoh and his public officials, and it turned into a snake. So Pharaoh called in all his magicians, and they did the exact same trick! Pharaoh's heart remained hard as a rock, and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron.

So they returned to God, and God said, "Go before Pharaoh again, and tell Aaron to wave the magic rod toward the river Nile. All the water in Egypt will become polluted. The fish will die and the water will be unfit to drink. All the rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, pools, even the water in drinking cups, will stink with blood. Tell Pharaoh the pollution is caused by his continued oppression of the Hebrew people."

So Moses and Aaron did as God commanded them. And behold, all the water in Egypt was stained with blood! But once more Pharaoh's magicians used their secret arts and enchantments to do the exact same trick. Pharaoh's heart remained hard.

So God gave Moses and Aaron another trick. Aaron waved the magic rod over the waters of Egypt, and frogs jumped out of the pools, and the canals, and the rivers. Folks couldn't even swallow without getting a frog in their throats.

There were frogs in the ovens and the skillets. Everyone in Egypt was playing leapfrog.

Finally Pharaoh had enough. He called Moses and Aaron before him and said, "I'll make a deal with you. Get rid of these frogs and I'll let your people go." Moses and Aaron took the deal to God, and on the very next day God killed all the frogs.

As soon as Pharaoh saw the dead frogs, he went back on the deal, and his heart was hardened again. So Aaron touched the dust of the earth with his magic rod, and the dust turned to gnats. Pharaoh's magicians couldn't duplicate the gnat trick. And they warned Pharaoh, "There must be some divine power here."

Moses and Aaron then began a serious dirty-tricks campaign against Pharaoh, with God's blessing, of course. God sent swarms of flies to fill the air in Egypt. Then all the cattle, and the horses, and the mules, and the camels, and the sheep, got sick. Then Moses and Aaron took handfuls of ashes and threw them up in the air, and behold, all the Egyptian people broke out with boils, and their animals too! Pharaoh and his people were sore disturbed.

Next God rained hail on the land of Egypt. Then God sent locusts to infest the land. After the locusts, God told Moses to reach his hand toward heaven, and the sun and moon disappeared. A nationwide blackout fell over Egypt.

After each trick Pharaoh promised to let the Hebrew people go if Moses and Aaron would get things back to normal, but he never kept his word.

So God said to Moses and Aaron, "Enough. About midnight I will kill the first-born. The first-born of all the cattle and the other beasts, the first-born of the lowliest servants in the land, and, yes, even the first-born of Pharaoh himself. I am going to kill the heir to the throne.

"Tell every Hebrew family to kill a nice lamb or goat for supper. But what's very important, take some of the lamb or goat's blood and brush it on the doorposts of each Hebrew household. That way I will know to pass over that house. As a matter of fact, that's what you will be doing while you eat supper—celebrating Passover."

Moses hurried away to spread the word. And the Hebrew people did as they were told; as God told Moses, so they did. Sure enough, at midnight, God killed all the first-born among the Egyptians! And a great cry of mourning arose in the land of Egypt.

In his great grief Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron that very night and said, "Go! Get out from the midst of my people, both you and the people of Israel. Take your flocks and your herds with you." Pharaoh paused for a moment and added, "And pray for me."

But Moses demanded reparations—jewelry of silver and gold, and clothing for his people. Since Pharaoh was willing to grant anything, Moses wiped him out.

Many, many years later the sorcerers of another land used their special arts to enchant the rulers of the nation and fool the public. The sorcerers were known as industrialists. And all of the land became polluted—the rivers, and the streams, and the lakes, and the ponds, and the pools, even the drinking water from the faucets. And divinely inspired men and women told the rulers and the industrialists that the bloodstains of oppression were behind the pollution of the waters and the air. But the rulers and the industrialists refused to listen, because their hearts were hardened by profit and greed, and the fish died, and the lips of the people were parched, and the land choked for fresh air and pure water, and the stink of pollution and oppression remained.

Commentary

The Hebrew slaves faced the same problem as Black folks in America. They had to go out and find their own raw materials to make bricks. Yet they were expected to compete with the same brick quota as when the straw was provided. Substitute "books" for "bricks" and you have the educational problem faced by Black folks in America today. We're made victims of inferior education and yet we're expected to compete with those who've had great educational advantages.

Schoolbooks have systematically excluded Black history, and both classroom instruction and curricula have been oriented toward the life experiences of white students. IQ tests and college-entrance exams follow the same pattern. Yet Black students are expected to compete. How well would the average white student do on an IQ test or college entrance exam written in ghettoese?

Over the past few years Black scholars and students have been "gathering their own straw" to make their own books. With the new raw materials, a revision of history is being written. Black studies have been increasingly included in colleges and universities.

But the once-fashionable recruitment programs geared toward Black students have declined. Last year there was a decline in Black student enrollment in colleges and universities for the first time in five years. When white folks get to talking about quota systems or preferential treatment in schools, business and industry, or unions, they often end up sounding like Pharaoh.

Hebrew slaves bolstered the Egyptian construction in-

dustry just as Black slaves upheld the cotton industry. Business and industry thrive on oppression, and oppressive practices support the economy. During the time of war, industries with defense contracts profit. When the conflict is over, everyone who participated in the profit is affected. After the cease-fire in Vietnam, there were mass layoffs in defense plants and large unemployment lines.

Nations that participated with America in the oppressive Vietnam conflict felt the economic pinch when the war came to a halt. England supplied Rolls-Royce engines for American fighter jets. After the Vietnam war the economy of England went into chaos.

The plague of blood symbolizes a tragic reality. So often negotiations between nations or individuals happen only after bloodshed. Skyjackers or bank robbers come to terms only after the blood of hostages has been threatened or spilled. Prison reform occurs after inmates riot—shots are fired and blood is shed. Nations sit down at the treaty table usually only after war and killing. Secretary of State Kissinger becomes a Middle East mediator after the shedding of Arab and Israeli blood.

Pharaoh was willing to negotiate in earnest only after his own son was killed. Countless Hebrew mothers and fathers had lost sons. But Pharaoh only listened when death came to his own household. The loss of a loved one caused Pharaoh to change his oppressive ways.

I wonder how many wars would be avoided if the loved ones of national leaders were the first soldiers to face enemy fire?

13

See the Hebrew People Run! See the Egyptians Follow! See the Red Sea! See Pharaoh See Red!

(Exodus, Chapters 14-15)

After he had buried his son, Pharaoh had second thoughts. He realized he'd made a big mistake. Pharaoh's public officials came to him and said, "Do you realize what we've done? We've freed our slaves! How are we going to get along without Hebrews to do our work? We'll have to make our own bricks, build our own cities, pick our own cotton, even take care of our own kids!"

So Pharaoh called out the army. He mobilized all the chariots and horses in Egypt and set out after the people of Israel. As Pharaoh's army drew near, there was panic in the Israeli camp, and the people said to Moses, "Why have you done this to us? Are there no cemeteries in Egypt that you bring us here to die in the wilderness? We were better off as slaves in Egypt."

Moses said, "Keep the faith, brothers and sisters. Don't

be afraid. God will take care of us. Just listen and follow orders!"

When God heard Moses speaking thus, God thought it might be a good idea to give some orders. So God told Moses, "Lift up the magic rod over the Red Sea. The waters will part, and there will be a dry path in the middle of the sea. You tell the people to march on through. Then watch what I do to the Egyptians."

So Moses lifted the magic rod, and God sent strong winds to divide the waters. Moses commanded, "Forward, march!" And the people of Israel marched right through the Red Sea to the other side.

The Egyptians followed right along behind. But God caused the wheels of the chariots to get stuck in the mud, so the Egyptians couldn't catch the people of Israel. When the Egyptians realized they were up against forces beyond their control, they said, "Let's turn back. These Hebrews have Nature on their side."

But it was too late. Moses waved the magic rod again, and the walls of water tumbled in on the Egyptians. Every Egyptian horse and every Egyptian soldier was drowned! The people of Israel looked back and saw all the dead Egyptians washed up on the shore.

And Moses said to the people, "Now, what were you saying about cemeteries in Egypt?"

Commentary

Like Pharaoh, America also had second thoughts about freeing the slaves. The Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution said, "Let my

people go!" But the journey of the former Black slaves came to a quick halt in the wilderness of *de jure* and *de facto*—that is, official and camouflaged segregation.

That's what happens when a nation allows the Supreme Court to be its conscience rather than the Supreme Being. The moral laws of the Supreme Being are more consistent than the legal decisions of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled "separate but equal" in 1896, then reversed that doctrine in 1954. Twenty years later the Supreme Court declined to hear the De Funis case, which would settle some issues that resulted from that reversal, like quota systems and preferential treatment.

Pharaoh learned a lesson other military leaders were to learn later at their own expense. The mightiest armies on the face of the earth are no match for the forces of Nature. Both Hitler and Napoleon were warned not to invade Russia in the winter. Thinking their armies were mightier even than Nature, they ignored the advice.

The snow fell. The advancing armies froze in their tracks. Hitler and Napoleon fell too.

14
The New Morality

(Exodus, Chapters 19-20, 32-34)

Three months after the people of Israel left the land of Egypt, they camped in the wilderness of Sinai beside the mountain. On the morning of the third day there were loud claps of thunder, and great bolts of lightning, and a deafening trumpet blast. And the people trembled.

Then the whole mountain was wrapped in smoke and started shaking. The people said one to another, "No doubt about it, God must be up there!" So Moses went up the mountain to check it out.

Sure enough, God was there. God spoke Ten Words, which described what life would be like if the people of Israel kept their end of the contract with God. Of course, a word of God is a paragraph to mere human beings! God said:

I *alone* am your God, because I brought you out of the land of Egypt. You can't have any other gods besides me. I simply will not tolerate any rivals. Because, you see, I am a jealous God. With me, it's all or nothing at all. I punish severely those who disobey me, but my love knows no boundaries when it comes to those who obey me!

So it goes without saying you can't make any graven images

and worship them. If they are images of rival gods, I've already told you I won't tolerate it. If they're images of me, that's silly. Because I can't be imaged.

Be very careful when you use my name. Because to speak my name is to invoke my presence and get me personally involved in what you are talking about. So anyone who speaks my name, I'm going to hold them personally responsible for it.

Don't forget to set aside the seventh day of the week as a holy day called the Sabbath. That's a day of rest and relaxation; a time to get yourself together. You've got six other days to do your work. Like me. I created heaven and earth in six days, but on that seventh day I rested.

Honor your father and mother, that you may have a long, full, and abundant life.

Don't kill.

Don't commit adultery. Don't violate the person, or personal relationships, because of sexual desire. Because, in so doing, you are violating a divine gift and, therefore, violating me.

Don't steal.

Don't lie about your neighbor; neither in a court of law nor in slanderous gossip.

Don't have designs upon things that belong to your neighbor. For lack of a better word, I'll call it "covet." Don't covet.

God gave Moses two legal pads (tablets of stone) upon which God had scratched in the Ten Words.

Meanwhile, back at the camp, the people began to think Moses might have died. So they went to Aaron and said, "Get up, Aaron, and act like a leader! It looks like Moses might not be coming back. Make us a god to go before us and lead us!"

Aaron had been looking for something to do, and he was flattered to be the undisputed leader. So he said, "All right, bring me all the gold earrings in the camp." And the people took the gold rings from the ears of the wives, and the daughters, and the sons, and brought them to Aaron.

Aaron melted down the rings and made a golden calf. He announced, "Here is the god who brought you out of Egypt, O people of Israel!" The people made burnt offerings to the golden calf and worshiped it. They held a feast, eating, drinking, dancing, and playing before the altar of the golden calf.

Just about then, Moses came down the mountain carrying the two tablets of stone, upset because God had seemed angry. God had talked about consuming the people of Israel with fire because they had corrupted themselves. Moses didn't know what God meant at the time. But when he got within earshot of the camp, Moses heard all the noise—laughing and shouting and singing. And he saw a sight he couldn't believe! Moses was so mad he threw the tablets to the ground, and they shattered into pieces. So Moses and the people *both* broke the law. Moses' anger burned so hot that he ground the golden calf into powder, mixed it with water, and made the people drink it. "Drink your god," Moses shouted, "before you taste the wrath of the One True God!"

Moses said to Aaron, "What got into you?" Right away Aaron started blaming the people. "You know how these people are," Aaron said. "Always thinking up some kind of mischief."

The next morning Moses announced to the people, "I'm going back up the mountain to talk with God. Maybe I can make up for what you've done. But behave yourselves!"

So Moses went back up the mountain and begged God's forgiveness on behalf of the people of Israel. And God—being merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but by no means clearing the guilty—accepted Moses' apology.

Then God gave the Ten Words again, which Moses wrote on two new tablets. Moses bowed down his head and

worshiped, saying, "Thank you, God. Please don't ever leave us, even though we are stiff-necked and stubborn and inclined to mess up from time to time."

And God did stay, even though the people continued to mess up.

Commentary

House Majority Leader Thomas P. ("Tip") O'Neill (D-Mass.) says there's a line going around Washington suggesting if Rose Mary Woods had been Moses' secretary, we'd only have three commandments. There'd be seven unaccounted for.

Of course, Moses did set quite a precedent when he broke those original stone tablets. Destroy the original records of personal conversations! Since President Nixon is so fond of citing precedents for his behavior, I'm surprised his friend Billy Graham didn't hip him to Moses' executive action. President Nixon could have gone on national television and said, "Don't blame me. Look what Moses did when his trusted aide Aaron messed up!"

In light of recent events in the United States, it's frightening to realize the only Ten Commandments we have are secondhand transcripts. But the country would be a whole lot better off if the Ten Commandments were read as carefully by press, public, and politicians as the presidential transcripts. A careful reading of the Ten Commandments, and *obeying* them, would wipe out all the social, political, and international problems confronting the United States. Those problems were created by human beings. They can be solved by human beings who listen to Divine Wisdom.

I

There's only one Creator, one Universal Force and Power, that is worthy of undivided loyalty and respect. If human beings show respect for the Universal Force of Nature, things will be all right. Instead, folks try to make "gods" out of money, or property, or country. But obedience to God is more important than duty to country. Love of God is a much higher priority than love of money, property, or other possessions. They say, "Love of money is the root of all evil." But love of God is the source of all good.

II

You can't make a graven image of the Creator. But you can certainly make graven images of the lesser gods. Folks do it all the time. The flag has become a graven image. It's used to cover up the Sixth Commandment. The flag is the graven image of Patriotism. The god Patriotism commands, "Thou shalt kill your fellow human beings in defense of your country, or your country's foreign policy!"

Money, diamonds, jewelry, mansions, furs, and fine cars are all graven images of the god Possession. Money represents the god most Americans bow before. If you want proof, just look around the next time you're riding the commuter train. Check out how many folks are reading the *Wall Street Journal* or the stock-market report. Also notice how many are reading the Bible.

The only way to make an image of God is to look in the mirror. Your own reflection is the image of God. Every person has a spark of divinity and the potential to respond to the Universal Force in creation.

III

God's name should not be spoken carelessly, yet folks drag God's name into all kinds of Godless activity. The United States is always fighting wars under the banner "God Is on Our Side." If that was really true, guns would be unnecessary. Just send the chaplain out to lead the brigade armed only with his Bible. God would do the rest.

Folks will lie, cheat, steal, oppress, and even kill to get their hands on some green graven images bearing the inscription "In God We Trust." If folks really trusted God, they wouldn't be so hung up on getting more and more money.

A witness who knows he's going to lie will raise his hand in the courtroom and say, "So help me God!" I guess he means, "God help me beat this perjury rap!"

Whenever you hear a politician invoke the name of God, you can be pretty sure there are some tricks or cover-ups around somewhere. Politicians who do something decent and honest would probably want to take credit for it themselves. They don't want to share the spotlight with God.

In the pledge of allegiance we find the words "one nation under God." How can God be blamed for the oppressive social and political conditions in the United States? If the United States is really an example of a "nation under God," I sure would hate to see a nation under the Devil!

IV

Rest and Relaxation is not just an army term. We all need R & R. It's part of the Universal Order. A day of prayer and meditation should be set aside each week. It should be a time of coming to the source of faith, wisdom, and spiritual strength. Jesus told folks to let their light shine before their fellow human beings and said it doesn't make

sense to light a candle and put it under a bushel basket (Matthew 5:15-16). The Sabbath should be a day of recharging our batteries by tapping into the Divine Light. Failure to keep the Sabbath is burning the candle at both ends.

The Christian church changed the Sabbath from the last day of the week to the first. Unfortunately, the meaning of the day seems to have changed too.

Few people really celebrate Sunday as a Sabbath. After church, it becomes a day for family get-togethers or a party day. More violations to the body and to health take place on Sunday than on any other day—folks eating too much, drinking too much, and risking their lives driving home from family get-togethers. The same is true of holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving.

V

Our true parents are Mother Nature, our earthly mother, and the Heavenly Father. True respect for Mother Nature would never allow us to pollute the air and water, to carve up the soil and cut down the trees, or to violate the temple of our bodies by bad eating and drinking habits. And true respect for our Heavenly Father would never allow us to carve up and destroy our fellow human beings. Every day of every year should be Mother's Day *and* Father's Day.

VI

Society tries to make distinctions between kinds of killing, sanctioning some and punishing others. Murderers are punished. Killers who work for the government are given society's blessing. If a person kills a cop or assassinates a general in the Pentagon, he'll probably get the death penalty. When cops or soldiers kill, it's considered in the line of duty.

I once heard a story that tells a lot about attitudes toward killing. A woman was standing at her kitchen sink, cleaning some fish. The door was open, and a masked burglar quietly entered the house behind her back. Suddenly the woman turned around and was startled to see the masked man. Instinctively she plunged the knife in her hand into the man. He was killed instantly. When she pulled off the man's mask, the woman was horrified to see she had just killed her own son. The experience drove the woman insane.

I can't help wondering if the woman would have gone crazy if it had been *my* son she killed. Was she horrified by the act of killing, or by the fact that she'd killed her own flesh and blood? God's commandment doesn't make distinctions between victims. Just don't kill—period.

VII

Isn't it odd that the same folks who oppose sex education in the schools are in favor of prayer in the classrooms? Sex is a divine gift and a sacred trust.

VIII

Many folks apply this commandment only to muggers, burglars, shoplifters, or embezzlers. But there's all kinds of stealing. Segregation is a form of stealing. It is stealing another person's civil rights, another person's right to full human dignity.

Invasion of privacy is also a form of stealing. It is stealing a person's right to a private life. The commandment doesn't apply only to wiretappers and phone buggers. It also applies to parents who look through their kids' private possessions in search of incriminating evidence, and to married couples who listen to their partners' conversations on the extension phone.

IX

So many racist practices in America today are based upon a violation of the Ninth Commandment. Unscrupulous real-estate brokers bear false witness about new neighbors in the neighborhood to bust up a block, scare white folks into selling their homes, and jack up the purchasing price for Black buyers. Puerto Rican schoolchildren who cannot communicate in the classroom because their primary language is Spanish end up being listed on official school records as "mentally retarded." That's a cruel and false witness!

There are personal violations of the commandment that folks don't even consider. If someone calls another person "ugly," it is being false witness. Ugly by what standard? What are the marks of true beauty, physical appearance or the quality of a person's life?

Sometimes folks justify their false witness by saying it is necessary for some greater good. A person will bear false witness in filling out a job application or reference form with untruths and saying it was necessary to get the job. This is the commandment so flagrantly disregarded by those in charge of the dirty tricks of the CREEPS (the Committee to Re-elect the President). They felt it was necessary to bear false witness about Democratic opponents to bring about the greater good of President Nixon's re-election.

I was tempted once to bear false witness on a job application, but I thought of a way out. When I got to the line on the form asking "color," I just filled in "off-white." I let my employer figure out how far off it was!

X

Covetous thoughts are self-destructive. They keep folks from looking inside themselves and developing their own

potential. And they tempt folks to break some of the other commandments. For example, consider a covetous thought like "I wish I had Rockefeller's money." The only way to get someone else's money is by stealing and deception. Even the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation doesn't give it *all* away!

The same pattern holds true for the other commandments. Once you break one, the door is wide open to break others. Persons who make Property their god are ready-made real-estate blockbusters. Folks who follow the god Patriotism and its graven image of the flag will no doubt find themselves, or their kids, marching off to war. A nation that sanctions killing will also make graven images called medals and give them to "war heroes."

When Moses came down the mountain he discovered how fickle followers can be. A leader can provide inspiration, courage, or charisma, but they are of little value without an internal strength, direction, and commitment from the followers. Without personal strength and commitment, the followers will fall away as soon as the leader is gone. Those who see the assassination of a leader as a valid strategy also depend on the followers' being fickle.

Leaders can be fickle too. A leader can present a false image to the people to inspire a following. When something happens to shatter that image, the followers must be stronger than the leader.

The presidential transcripts are image-shattering reading, but they may prove to be the fulfillment of the leader's promise to "bring us together." The leader, of course, would say, "(Expletive deleted), that's not what I meant. I had in mind (tape inaudible)."

15
Outside Agitators

(Joshua, Chapter 6)

Before Moses died, he gave some thought to who'd be his successor. His hand-picked candidate was Joshua, a bright young man with a good deal of promise.

So the Lord God spoke to Joshua and said, "My servant Moses is dead, so now I'm putting you in charge. Be strong and courageous, and keep my rules. Just don't mess with the law!"

Joshua shouted, "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition! God is on our side!" And he went out and spread the word that in three days they'd all cross over the river Jordan and take the promised land.

The people folded up their tents and lined up in formation for the big trip. The priests moved to the head of the line, carrying the ark of the covenant, a symbol of the contract God had made with the descendants of Abraham. When the priests stepped into the river, the waters moved away, leaving a dry path in the river bed.

And the priests shouted, "Surf's up!" and the people

moved on through. When they reached the opposite shore, they sang "Roll, Jordan, Roll," and the Jordan did.

While the people of Israel were camped in Gilgal, just east of the city of Jericho, Joshua looked up one day and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand.

Joshua said, "Are you going to cut me, man? Are you for us or against us? Or are you just a mugger?"

The man said, "No, nothing like that. The Lord sent me. I'm the commander of God's army, and I've come to give you help."

Joshua fell down flat on the ground and said, "As you can see, I'm at your service. What do you want me to do?"

And the commander of God's army said, "Take off your shoes. You're on holy ground."

Now the people of Israel had Jericho surrounded, so the town was closed up tight. The people of Jericho were also uptight. Nobody came and nobody left. The Lord God spoke to Joshua and outlined an unusual battle plan.

God said, "I'm telling you in advance, Joshua, you're going to win this one. I'm going to give you Jericho with its mighty king and its super-brave men.

"For six days I want you and your soldiers to march around Jericho once a day. On the seventh day, take along the ark and some priests with ram's-horn trumpets. March around the city walls seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets. When they make a long, loud, final blast, have all the people shout as loud as they can. The wall of the city will fall down flat, and you can move right in.

"The united voice of the people shall cause the barriers against you to tumble."

On the seventh day they got up early in the morning and marched. They circled around Jericho *seven* times. The sev-

enth time around, Joshua and the priests and the people did their thing.

The priests were blowing their trumpets, and the people were marching around, and Joshua yelled, "Shout! God's gonna give you the city!"

The people screamed as the trumpets continued to blow. It was a real jam session. And the walls of Jericho came tumbling down! Just like God had said! "Right on!" said the Israeli army. And they went right on in and took the city.

So the Lord God was with Joshua that day, and Joshua's fame spread throughout the land for his successful and unusual seven-day war. Thousands of years later Israel won another war, cutting the winning time by one day.

Commentary

There's an ageless message in the rubble of the crumbled walls of Jericho. If outside agitators have the endurance to follow their battle plan patiently, and if they make enough noise—loud enough and long enough—walls of oppression crack and eventually come tumbling down. Think what would have happened if Louis Armstrong had led the civil rights movement!

During the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the steady marching and the persistent loud and clear voices of protest *did* crumble walls. Walls of discrimination had been erected using legislation as bricks and mortar, carefully piling law upon law to keep Black people from enjoying the rights of full citizenship. But the patient marching of civil rights demonstrators cracked those legal barriers, getting new legislation on the books.

The civil rights movement of the sixties cracked the walls of fear that had so long immobilized oppressed people. When the walls of fear crumbled for Black people, other oppressed people in the United States lost their fears too. The civil rights movement spawned the human rights movement. Women, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Indians, gays, and others began to organize and resist their own oppression as never before.

Sometimes the persistent day-in-and-day-out marching around the so-called mighty walls of discrimination and exclusion seems both futile and pointless. The temptation might be for tired demonstrators to give up a day too soon. But it takes time to tumble those mighty walls.

The grape boycott led by Cesar Chavez is a good example. For Chavez, the hundred-million-dollar-a-year grape industry in Delano, California, was his Jericho, and the United Farm Workers Union, representing the rights of those who cultivated the vineyards, was to be his army.

Chavez fasted, struggled, organized, spoke, and inspired. He awakened the moral sensitivities in others. Churches and clergymen rallied to his support. Morally dedicated youth throughout America saw in Chavez a spirit totally opposed to injustice and oppression. They quickly made his cause their own.

So the young folks marched around supermarkets all over the United States. They stood there day after day, passing out leaflets urging customers not to buy scab-produced grapes. At the very time so many Americans were condemning youth as violence-prone, unruly rebels, the young folks non-violently filled picket lines to boycott grapes, reminding their elders that "you are what you eat." Don't eat grapes, they kept saying, not these grapes and not now.

It took a long time, but those young folks and Chavez didn't give up. Finally, the walls of comfort and greed came tumbling down! Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Organizing Committee got their contracts.

There are other Jerichos.

The youth of America, and some of their elders, marched around the Pentagon in Washington, D. C., in the fall of 1967. And they kept on marching in towns all over the country, until more and more Americans got the word that the war in Vietnam must cease. The walls began to crack.

As those marching feet multiplied, the walls came tumbling down around Jericho. President Lyndon B. Johnson announced he would not run again. He couldn't stand the noise of those trumpets!

16
The Dangers of a First Haircut: the Story of Samson and Delilah

(Judges, Chapters 13-16)

Joshua died ten years younger than his predecessor Moses, Joshua being a mere 110 years old at the time of his death. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of God. They became just like the people who surrounded them, bowing down and worshiping false gods. They took their own God for granted, thinking it was God's business to forgive.

So God's anger was kindled against Israel, which meant God was burning mad. The Lord gave the people of Israel over to plunderers; still, the Lord God heard their moaning and raised up judges who saved the people from their plunderers. But the people did not listen to their judges either, and as soon as a judge died, the people went back to their sinful practices and stubborn ways. They refused to keep their end of the contract their forefathers made with

God, nor did they obey God's commandments. So God decided not to give the surrounding nations of Joshua, just to see if Israel would shape up one day.

One of the judges God raised up was named Samson. He was a mighty leader in battle. One time he went against the Philistines, who were lording it over Israel at the time, with only the jawbone of an ass for a weapon. It was the first asinine weapon used in battle, but many more have been invented since.

Samson's undoing came when he fell in love with a woman named Delilah. The lords of the Philistines came to Delilah one day and said, "We want to know where Samson's great strength comes from, and you're the only one in a position to trick him into telling. There's eleven hundred pieces of silver in it from each one of us if you find out and tell us how to overpower Samson."

It was rumored at the time that the lords carried the silver around in suitcases and that they represented a secret group called CREEP—the Committee to Remove Every Enemy of the Philistines.

So Delilah sidled up to Samson one day and said, "Sammy, honey, please tell me how you got so strong, and just how somebody might bind you up and subdue you."

Samson said, "Funny you should ask. If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that haven't been dried, I become weak and just like any other man."

The lords of the Philistines brought Delilah seven fresh bowstrings, which they borrowed from the CIA (Counter-Israelite Agency), and Delilah playfully bound up Samson one day. But there were men hiding in an inner chamber, watching the whole operation.

After Samson was all tied up, Delilah shouted, "Look

out for the Philistines, Samson!" And Samson flexed his muscles and the bowstrings snapped easily. So the secret of his strength remained a mystery.

Delilah came to Samson again and said, "Behold, you lied to me! C'mon now, Sammy, honey, please tell me how you can be bound."

Samson said, "If they bind me with new ropes that haven't been used, I'll become just as weak as your Philistine men."

Delilah took some unused rope she had lying around and tied Samson up, saying, "You mean like this?" Then she said, "Look out for the Philistines, Samson!" And the men who had been hiding came running out. But Samson flexed his muscles again, and the ropes melted away. And the Philistines split.

Now Delilah was really angry. She said, "You say you love me, but when I ask you a little thing like the secret of your strength, you refuse to tell me. You don't love me. You just use me, and . . ."

Samson had had it up to the locks of his hair with hearing her mouth. "All right, all right already!" Samson shouted. "I'll tell you. I've never had a haircut. That's the source of my strength. If I ever went to the barber, my strength would leave me. Now are you satisfied?"

This time Delilah knew Samson wasn't kidding. So she called the lords of the Philistines and told them to bring the money. Then, when Samson fell asleep on her lap, Delilah called a barber and had him cut Samson's hair.

Samson woke up with a start, and, not knowing his hair had been cut, he said to himself, "I guess I'll have to beat up a few Philistines so she'll let me sleep." But the Lord had left Samson. And the Philistines grabbed him and gouged out

his eyes and put bronze chains on him and set him to work grinding at the mill in prison.

Now the lords of the Philistines threw a big celebration in honor of their god Dagon. The house was full of men and women, three thousand in all. Everybody shouted, "Dagon has delivered our enemy into our hands, that great ravager of our country, Samson, who has killed so many of us." Everybody got happy and drunk and they decided to have some fun with Samson.

The lords of the Philistines said, "We've always heard blind entertainers are something else. Bring in old Samson to put on a show for us. He's sure to be out of sight!"

So Samson was led in from prison and placed between two pillars holding up the house. But the lords of the Philistines did not realize Samson's hair had started to grow back while he was in prison.

Samson said to the lad who was leading him, "Put one of my hands on each pillar." Then Samson called out to the Lord, saying, "Remember me, God? I pray thee, give me one last wish. Grant me strength to be avenged upon the Philistines for at least one of my eyes. And let me die with these Philistines."

And with that he pushed on the pillars with all his might, and the house fell in on everybody.

Commentary

I wonder if there isn't a relationship between haircuts and a loss of *moral* strength. I thought about that while I was watching H. R. Haldeman testify on television at the Senate Watergate hearings. I just couldn't believe his 1950s haircut.

Nostalgia is one thing, but that haircut was something else! Don't get me wrong. It would be a perfect haircut if anyone was going to the electric chair!

Haldeman's haircut reminded me of a porcupine. My cousin has a porcupine for a pet. He told me that every time there was a TV close-up of Haldeman's haircut, his porcupine got all horny!

Then when I heard Haldeman's testimony I knew there must be a relationship between haircuts and honesty. During President Nixon's first term in office, I used to read about H. R. Haldeman—how brilliant he was, how he ran a tight ship, and how the President took orders from him. But hearing Haldeman testify, you would think he left his house one day with amnesia. All of a sudden he ended up in the White House. And he didn't know how he got there or what he was supposed to do.

Straight society believes that the well-trimmed haircut and the well-pressed Brooks Brothers suit are marks of morality. So straight society is always putting down long-haired hippies. But Al Capone was always well dressed and well trimmed. And Anastasia was wiped out while sitting in a barber chair. On the other hand, Jesus wore his hair long and natural.

The army gives young men a short, military-regulation haircut as the first step in their training to be killers. Most police-department regulations require cops' hair to be cut no longer than collar length. It seems like everyone who makes a living by using a gun also makes frequent trips to the barber.

It just may be that God never intended for human beings to cut their hair. Hair may have the same relationship to the body that leaves have to plants and trees. In the process of photosynthesis, leaves trap the sun's rays and hold them

until the sun gets to its furtherest point north. Leaves retain the life energy necessary for the survival of plants.

The same thing may be true of hair. Hair may be related to both physical strength and moral sensitivity. If so, it would help to explain the profound strength of women. Women will go outside bare-legged in sub-zero weather, stand in the cold waiting for a bus, work eight hours, and come home in the evening with enough love and strength left to care for the needs of their children.

So maybe Shakespeare really had barbers in mind when he wrote the words, "That was the most unkindest cut of all!"

17
The Bigger They Come

(I Samuel, Chapter 17)

The battle lines were drawn. On one mountain stood the Philistines, and on another mountain stood Saul and the men of Israel, and there was a valley between them. No doubt about it, there was a fight brewing!

And there went out from the camp of the Philistines a champion, a real black-belt, gold-medal killer named Goliath. Goliath was from Gath, and he was a giant among men. He stood up to his full height, which was six cubits and a span, or about nine and a half feet, and he was an absolutely terrifying study in bronze armor.

But Goliath was no Jolly Bronze Giant. Goliath was mean. He bellowed, "Look at the little kosher soldiers over there, all dressed up for battle! Do you think you servants of Saul are any match for a Philistine? That'll be the day!

"Choose your best man and let him fight with me. If he kills me, then we will be your servants. But if I kill him, which of course is inevitable, you will be our servants and serve us. I *defy* you to send a man before me!"

When Saul and all Israel heard Goliath's words, they were dismayed and scared to death. Goliath came out to shout his challenge twice a day for forty days, every morning and every evening.

Now David was the youngest of eight sons of Jesse, who lived in Bethlehem. David's three older brothers had followed Saul into battle, such as it was, and David ran errands back and forth between the Israeli camp and tending his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

One day David took some parched grain and bread to his brothers. He also had some cheeses his father had sent along to their commander. After leaving his provisions with the keeper of the baggage, David ran to greet his brothers, just as Goliath came out to perform his morning challenging act.

Little David said to the men of Israel, "Who does this uncircumcised Philistine think he is? Where does he get off defying the armies of the Living God?"

David's oldest brother heard him talking so militant, and, being fearful of Goliath himself, was angry because David sounded so naïvely brave. He said to David, "What are you doing here anyway? Who's taking care of the sheep?"

David answered, "Why are you sounding on me? What did I do now? All I said was, as big as this giant is, he's no match for God." David's words were heard and reported to Saul. So Saul sent for David.

David said to Saul, "Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine. Your servant has kept his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear took a lamb from the flock, I went and took the lion by the beard and killed it to rescue the lamb. I've killed both lions and bears, and the same God who delivered me from the paws of lions and bears will deliver me from the paws of this Philistine."

Saul was convinced to give it a try, and he said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"

Saul tried to put David in a suit of armor, but he just couldn't get it to fit. So David chose his own weapons. He picked out five smooth stones from the brook and put them into his shepherd's bag. Then he took his staff and his slingshot and marched out to meet Goliath.

Goliath drew near to meet David. When he saw David was but a youth, healthy and handsome, but a kid just the same, Goliath was disgusted. He said, "What do you think I am, a dog, that you dare come to fight me with sticks?"

David answered, "I come in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, whom you have defied. God's going to get you today. In God's name, I will knock you down and cut off your head, and then all the earth will know there is a God in Israel. You've got to be some kind of fool to think you can fight God!"

Goliath charged at David. But David took out a stone from his bag, put it in his slingshot, and struck Goliath dead in the head! Just like he said, David cut off the giant's head and took his armor as a souvenir.

After it was all over, David mused to himself, "Who said a little Jewish boy couldn't get a head in this world?"

Commentary

David killed Goliath with a slingshot, which only goes to prove what consumer-protection advocates like Ralph Nader have been saying all along. Kids' toys can be dangerous! If a toy can be used to wipe out your enemies, maybe that's what President Nixon had in mind when he

was playing with a yo-yo on national television. I wouldn't have been surprised to see the President come out with a White House yo-yo list.

Physical harm isn't the only danger in toys. Toys can also cause psychological and emotional damage. Guns and war toys introduce kids to a violent way of life at a very early age. Even worse, such toys teach kids to think of war as a game. The soldier, cop, hunter, mugger, and bank robber with their guns are just going through a second childhood.

Toys are also used to suggest subtly the roles society expects boys and girls to fulfill. Dolls, sewing machines, stoves, and kitchen utensils tell little girls they have a future as housewives and mothers. Doctor kits, chemistry sets, and airplanes tell little boys they can grow up to be doctors, scientists, or pilots.

White-oriented toys, white dolls or white GI Joes, and the packaging of toys and games that show only white kids at play are bound to have an emotional effect upon Black and other non-white children who use them. The subtle message (too often proved true in later life) is that you have to be white to have fun.

You can find a similar study in subtle mental abuse of Black kids in the ghetto supermarket. At the baby-food counter you will find jars of fruits and vegetables with pictures of white babies on the outside rather than pictures of the food on the inside. What's being sold? White babies or mashed turnips? At that very tender and impressionable age the Black baby has to go through the white baby's picture just to get his food!

The story of David and Goliath follows a pattern that remains true today. The old men make the policies that start the wars. Then they reach back and get the youth to fight

the battles. When the battle is won, the old men take over again to plunder the vanquished. The pattern is called "foreign policy."

Only youth themselves can reverse the pattern. The challenge to youth today is to say loud and clear that war and killing can never be justified. The united voice of youth must make it clear to their elders that if the old folks start a war, they're going to have to fight it themselves. That would put a stop to war in a hurry.

Appeals to the Old Testament or to Old Glory do not provide an excuse for killing as a solution to problems, whether the solution offered is war or capital punishment. Unfortunately, when it comes to justifying war and killing, there seems to be no separation between Church and State.

18
Divide and Conquer

(I Kings 3:16-28)

At this time, Solomon was king of Israel. One day two ladies of the evening came bitin', kickin', scratchin', and screamin' into the king's court, to get his ruling on a dispute.

"I'll tell you just what happened, my lord," one woman began. "Me and that person over there live in the same house. I gave birth to a little boy, and then three days later she did too. We was alone in the house, nobody there but us and the babies.

"Then one night that clumsy old fool gets to tossin' and turnin' in her sleep and rolls over on her baby and kills him. So you know what she did? She comes into where I was sleepin' and takes my little baby. Then she put her dead baby in bed with me.

"When I got up in the morning to nurse my baby, I saw he was dead. Well, I like to have died myself. Then I take a closer look, and I see it's not my baby. It's her baby. That's just the way it was, my lord."

The other woman screamed, "She's lyin', King! The dead kid's hers. The live one's mine."

The first woman said, "Will you listen to her, my lord!"

And the two women commenced to pullin' each other's hair again, but they stopped short when they heard the voice of King Solomon.

"Now let me see if I've got this straight, ladies," the king said. "You each claim to be the rightful mother of the living child. Right? And you each claim the dead child belongs to the other. Correct?"

Suddenly the king had an inspiration. "Bring me a sword!" The court aides scurried out and brought back a sword. "Now," announced the king in his most official tone, "since the dispute concerns ownership claim and custody of the living child, and both parties to the dispute present the court with a legitimate claim to parenthood, a fair settlement would seem to be a division of the property in question. Take the sword and cut the kid in half! And give each woman one half!"

Everybody stood there stunned for a second. Then the first woman, in obvious pain and anguish, cried out, "Oh, no, my lord! Don't kill the baby! I admit I was wrong. Give the child to her."

But the second woman said, "You're absolutely right, King. Cut the baby in half. If I'm not going to have a living child of my own, she's not either!"

King Solomon said, "Case dismissed. Give the child to the first woman. She is the real mother."

Word got around to all Israel, and when folks heard about the incident they said, "King Solomon sure is smart! Somewhat unorthodox methods, but smart as a whip!"

Commentary

King Solomon was a wise man because he understood that true wisdom embraces heart and mind in tune with values like human compassion in the Universal Order. True wisdom is spiritual and displays a respect for Nature, realizing the sanctity of all life. Human beings are born with all the knowledge they need to survive in life. True wisdom is learning to apply natural, instinctive spiritual knowledge to day-by-day life situations.

There's a big difference between true wisdom and intellectual achievement. Intellectual achievement for most who seek it means learning how to make a living. True wisdom is learning how to live. Unfortunately, colleges and universities today are more concerned with intellectual achievement than with true wisdom.

Pride feeds upon intellectual achievement. Humility is nurtured by true wisdom. Intellectual achievement is based upon competition. The ego is inflated by recognition—honorary degrees, first in the class (or at least better than someone else), Nobel and Pulitzer prizes, and so on. True wisdom produces just the opposite reaction—a humble, selfless attitude that respects the balance of Nature. Humility is expanded by the recognition of one's natural place in the created order of the universe.

True wisdom comes from God. College degrees come from men and women. Folks with college degrees will do things persons with true wisdom would never consider doing. A man can have three Harvard Ph.D.s and still end up as an alcoholic on Skid Row. A truly wise man may never have been to school a day in his life, but he knows enough

not to upset the balance of his natural body by filling it with alcohol.

Or a man can be appointed Secretary of State who has excellent Harvard credentials, indicating overwhelming intellectual achievement. The same man can bring the nation down to the ground by sanctioning war. No Secretary of State who has true wisdom would ever let the country be destroyed by war and violence. True wisdom abhors war and killing as a solution to problems. True wisdom understands the source of the only power that really counts, and places moral right over military might. Understanding the spiritual dimensions of power, men and women of true wisdom do not seek to be powerful on the world's terms.

True wisdom has a profound respect for the balance of Nature. Nature has no respect for intellectual achievement. And intellectual achievement has proved over and over again that it does not respect Nature. The same intellect that pours concrete and erects huge buildings with no regard for the trees and natural life will establish urban-renewal programs with no regard for the relocation needs of people. The intellect that creates both the automobile and air pollution cannot create plants and foliage to absorb the pollution or to feed hungry people.

The disregard for Nature and true wisdom is reflected in the legal system. The more intellectually advanced a society becomes, the greater is the need for laws and lawyers. As folks get farther away from the laws of Nature, they find a greater need to set up laws of their own.

The result is a legal system that places emphasis upon shrewd intellect rather than true wisdom. When folks get into trouble with the law, they don't look for honest, compassionate representation. They try to find the shrewdest, smartest, cleverest lawyer they can to get them off.

Sometimes they look for shrewd ways to avoid the law completely. When President Nixon got his first subpoena for a set of his tapes, he sent his lawyer into court to answer the subpoena. The lawyer said the President had listened to the tapes himself and was convinced there was nothing wrong. But the lawyer said also that the President wasn't going to turn the tapes over to the court because some people might listen to them and get a different impression.

I've certainly learned a lot from President Nixon. If I ever get a subpoena, I'm going to send my cousin into court. And my cousin will give the same explanation President Nixon's lawyer gave. I can just hear my cousin in court:

"Judge, your honor. I come to answer the subpoena you sent to Dick Gregory. You want to know what he's got growin' in them flower pots in his window. Well, it's cabbage! He let me take 'em home with me overnight. And I smoked a couple of 'em. So I know it's cabbage. But he's not going to bring the cabbage into court because some of you might get a different impression."

So-called advanced society gets so far away from Nature, laws even seem to conspire against responding to Mother Nature's call. Suppose I'm out on the street in public and suddenly feel Mother Nature's call. Even if there's no toilet in sight, I'd be arrested for responding to the call and relieving myself against a tree. I wouldn't be arrested for relieving myself, only for *exposing* myself.

As long as I didn't unzip my pants I could stand there in public and relieve myself all I wanted to. The chief of police could even drive by while I was relieving myself, fully clothed and tightly zipped. He might stop and say, "What're you doing there?" And I'd answer, "Just warming my leg, officer!" And he'd drive right on by.

King Solomon's court followed the laws of Nature. His

decision brought out the best instincts of true wisdom. King Solomon knew the real mother would sacrifice everything to save the life of her own flesh and blood. The wisdom of King Solomon is repeated today by all those humble folks who have a greater concern for the poor and the oppressed than for their own comfort and self-interest. They are flesh-and-blood relatives of their fellow human beings. They are truly wise.

19
The Water Gate Hearing

(Nehemiah, Chapter 8)

Now, at this point in time, Nehemiah governed the land and Ezra was a scribe and priest. And all the people gathered themselves together in the street as one person and stood facing the Water Gate. The people planned to have a hearing. So they told Ezra to requisition the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had given Israel.

Ezra stood behind a wooden structure, built for the Water Gate hearing, and opened the Book of the Law. All the others helping to conduct the hearing stood alongside Ezra. And Ezra stood before the nation facing the Water Gate and read the Law. He read from morning until midday.

And all the people of the nation who were old enough to understand the proceedings stood with their eyes glued upon Ezra and his committee, and the Water Gate, and heard the reading of the Law. Members of Ezra's committee, who were called Levites, interpreted the Law, making it perfectly clear, and helped the people understand all that was happening before the Water Gate.

As Ezra read the Law, he also praised God, and quoted

the Bible, and reminded people of their religious origins. And all the people shouted, "Amen and amen!" They bowed their heads, and raised their hands, and worshiped the Lord.

The reading of the Law brought tears to the eyes of the people, and they wept openly. For the Water Gate hearing caused the people to see the great distance between the Laws of God and what had been going on in the nation.

But Ezra and his committee said to the people, "All that has gone on before is hereby declared inoperative! Do not weep or mourn. This is a happy day, holy to the Lord your God. You should leave this Water Gate hearing in a festival mood. Make this a holiday. Drink sweet wine and eat the fat. And be very sure to give portions to all those who don't have any. For God's sake, don't be sorry about this Water Gate hearing. For the joy of the Lord is your strength."

And all the people departed to eat, drink, and be merry. And they shared with one another, because they truly understood the significance of the Water Gate hearing.

After that, a new mood prevailed in the nation of Israel. Things were not as they were before. The people admitted their faults, confessed their sins, fasted, repented, observed the holy days, and made the Laws of God the law of the land.

And so it was that a pattern was established. When things get really out of hand in the nation, bring the people before the Water Gate.

Commentary

There's something about Watergate hearings that brings on the response of people "weeping openly." When the Senate Watergate hearings were held on national television,

networks and many TV viewers shed a few tears. The networks were crying because of the revenue they lost from sponsors during the hours of the hearings. And TV viewers wept because they missed their favorite soap operas.

But those Watergate hearings really went over big in the Black community. I know Black folks who went out and bought a television to watch the Watergate hearings who don't even have electricity in their house! My cousin was broke, but when he heard the Watergate hearings were going to be on television he went out and stole five TV sets. Now he's in jail. He would have gotten away clean, but he was stupid enough to mail in those ninety-day warranties.

It really came as a surprise to Black folks to see all those white folks telling on each other. We didn't know anybody did that but us. And we don't do it on national television.

There weren't any Blacks testifying in those hearings. After the Watergate scandal broke, I understand the congressional Black Caucus sent a telegram to President Nixon, thanking him for not having any Blacks in his cabinet or on his campaign committee. If there had been just one Black aide at the top, we would have been blamed for the whole thing.

I can just hear G. Gordon Liddy in federal court now. He would tell Judge Sirica, "It was President Nixon's Black aide, Jabo Jone, who did it." And Judge Sirica would say, "How could one man be responsible for bugging the whole Watergate?" And Liddy would answer, "He did it with a watermelon, Judge!"

The televised Watergate hearings also did a lot to remind folks of the real meaning and purpose of religion. It was like a Sunday school lesson to see Senator Sam Ervin preaching and quoting Bible verses to all those witnesses who had been going to the White House worship services. If Billy Graham had gotten the Bible across as well as Sam

Ervin, the Watergate scandal might not have happened.

Some folks were surprised when the grand jury indictments were originally handed down in the Watergate case. But that just shows they don't understand the ethnic composition of certain areas of the country. The grand jury was impaneled in Washington, D. C., which is some 75 per cent black, and the grand jury reflected that percentage in its membership. So, the problem wasn't whether or not an indictment would be handed down. The real problem was getting the grand jury to sit still until all the evidence was presented.

My cousin served on that grand jury. He didn't know the grand jury indictment was for Watergate until he read it in the news. He thought they were indicting the administration for cutting off the poverty program.

The first Water Gate hearing, conducted by Ezra, produced a new day in the nation of Israel. Folks went away from the Water Gate with a new sense of personal and national moral responsibility. They began to observe the religious holidays and made the Laws of God the law of the land.

The Watergate hearings have also produced a new day in America. The new day began when certain individuals proved the truth of Andrew Jackson's statement, "One man [person] with courage is the majority." Federal Judge John Sirica had the courage to get to the bottom of the Watergate scandal. He refused to let the break-in at National Democratic Headquarters slip by as an isolated and unrelated incident. And two young men with courage, *Washington Post* reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, unrelentingly kept digging up the facts and printing them, until the whole nation heard the Watergate message. And columnist Jack Anderson kept printing important Watergate documents to keep that message alive.

Like the people of Israel, Americans should go away from the Watergate hearings with renewed appreciation of the meaning of national holidays and documents. If Americans learn to celebrate the Fourth of July by *really* reading and understanding the words of the Declaration of Independence, the oppressed poor in America *must* benefit from that celebration.

Watergate should show Americans once and for all that the Laws of God must be reflected in the laws and practices of the land. Watergate demonstrates that it is impossible to talk about "law and order" without mentioning justice. The Watergate hearings focused public attention as never before upon the issue of "national security"—White House surveillance, enemy lists, tax audits, and the President's holding back vital information to preserve his own security within the nation—that is, to avoid impeachment.

Now we should know that the greatest threat to national security is America's abuse of citizens right here at home.

Instead of breaking into doctors' offices to steal medical records, a secure nation will provide health care for the poor and elderly.

Instead of burglarizing the Watergate housing complex, national security requires building decent housing for everyone.

Instead of bugging the phones of White House enemies, the roaches, rats, and bugs must be exterminated from the kitchens and cribs of ghetto tenements.

And, most of all, instead of feeding lies to the press and the public, a White House concerned about the security of the nation will make sure no one in America goes hungry.

20
Who's King of the King of the Beasts?

(Daniel, Chapters 1, 6)

Jehoiakim had been king of Judah only three years when Nebuchadnezzar came from Babylonia and besieged and conquered Jerusalem.

One day King Nebuchadnezzar called in his main eunuch, Ashpenaz, and said, "I'm thinking about setting up a civil service system. I want you to recruit some folks from the people of Israel." Ashpenaz said, "Anything you say, O King. Will we have to draw up a civil service exam?"

"You use your own judgment on that, Ash," the king answered. "Civil service tests can be a hassle. I doubt we'd be bothered by ethnic protests, since only Jews would be taking the test. But then there's age, sex, and class discrimination. I only want young lads, both from the royalty and the nobility. They've got to be very handsome. No acne! And they've got to be very bright, high ratings in comprehension, knowledge, and understanding. Because I want them to serve in the palace while they're being taught the letters and language of the Chaldeans."

Then the king had a bright idea. "Don't tell the Hebrew

ads it's a civil service exam," the king said. "Tell them it's a ontest. Say the New Frontier administration of Babylonia s looking for the best and the brightest, and we're testing heir IQs."

"Excuse me, O King, but what's an IQ?" Ashpenaz entured to ask.

"Israeli Qualifications," the king answered.

Among the best and brightest brought to the palace of he king was a lad named Daniel. Meat, wine, and books vere to be their steady diet for three years, and at the end of hat time they were to be brought before the king.

But Daniel was on a religious and health-food kick. He vas determined not to eat the king's meat or drink his wine. The chief eunuch sympathized, because God had touched iis heart with compassion and favor toward Daniel, but he iad to look out for his own skin. "What if I allow you to eat our health food," he told Daniel, "and it turns out you're in poorer condition than those who ate the king's meat? The ing would have my head!" The chief eunuch felt he'd already lost enough without risking his head too.

"Test me for ten days," Daniel begged. "Give us only vegetables and water. After ten days, you be the judge." Sure enough, after ten days Daniel and his three companions were healthier and more handsome than all the others. The lesson was so convincing that everyone was put on a vegetable diet from then on.

Daniel grew in wisdom and understanding; he learned o interpret dreams and visions as well. When the three years iad passed, Daniel and his companions answered all the ing's questions perfectly—ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers in the kingdom.

Years passed, and Darius the Mede was king of Babylon. t pleased the new king to set up a program of decentraliza-

tion. He appointed one hundred and twenty governors and scattered them throughout the kingdom, with a troika of presidents over the governors, one of whom was Daniel.

Daniel excelled in the eyes of the king. King Darius liked his spirit. When the other members of the troika and the governors got wind of the king's plan to set him up over the whole kingdom, they were jealous and formed a conspiracy to get Daniel. But they knew that Daniel was faultless. There were no bribery or kick-back charges against him, nor had he been involved in any cover-ups.

So they settled on a dirty-tricks campaign. They said to one another, "If we're going to get Daniel, we'll have to frame him in connection with the Law of his God." They gave their plan a code name and sent a delegation to see the king.

They said, "O King Darius, live forever! All the appointed public officials are agreed that Your Highness should issue an edict and enforce it. It should say that any person who prays to any god or man except you, O King, for the next thirty days shall be cast into the den of lions."

King Darius trusted his appointed aides, so he signed the edict. It was known as the amendment to the law concerning prayer in the schools and homes.

Now Daniel refused to let a law of man interfere with his duty to God, so he continued to go to the upper chamber of his house three times a day, where he got down on his knees and prayed to God, with his face toward Jerusalem. The dirty-tricks campaign committee hid in waiting and caught Daniel in the act. And since there were no tape recorders in those days, they memorized some of the words of the prayers to enter into evidence before the king.

The delegation went before the king and asked, "O King! Did you not issue an edict and sign it into law, saying

that no man should pray to anyone but you?" Then they laid their evidence before the king. "The exile from Judah named Daniel disobeys your law. He prays three times each day to his God."

King Darius realized he had been used and tried to figure out a way to manipulate the law without appearing to break it, thereby saving Daniel. King Darius thought, "Maybe I could just deny ever having talked with the delegation." But the delegation returned and threatened, "If you do not invoke punishment upon Daniel, we'll leak our information to the scribes and scholars."

King Darius knew he was trapped by his own requirements of law and order. So he commanded that Daniel be cast into the den of lions, hoping God would save his friend. The king started fasting immediately; he couldn't sleep, and he refused any entertainment or diversion.

As soon as the sun came up, King Darius hurried to the lions' den. He stood outside the sealed entrance and cried out in an anguished voice, "O Daniel, servant of the living God! Has your God, whom you serve day in and day out, been able to save you from the lions?"

King Darius heard the voice of Daniel saying, "O King, live forever! I'm not hurt. God sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths. I have been found blameless before God and before you, O King. The truth is my ally in this whole conspiracy."

King Darius was exceeding glad. He said to the lions, "I've got a substitute for you." And the king cast all of Daniel's accusers, along with their wives and children, into the den of lions. And the lions tore them all limb from limb.

King Darius sat right down and wrote a worldwide memo to all the nations, peoples, and languages in all the earth. Since they were all in his kingdom, the king's memo was official. The memo said:

This letter comes in peace. Ask not what your king can do for you, but what you can do for the God of Daniel. Let the word go forth that all my royal dominion shall fear and tremble before the One Living and Everlasting God, Who shall rule forever and Whose kingdom shall never be destroyed. God delivers and rescues, works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. This Great God even saved Daniel from the lions! Selah.

So Daniel was saved because he trusted God. And King Darius was converted. He called in the royal silversmith and said, "I've got a great slogan for our coins. In God We Trust."

Commentary

I'd be a lot more impressed with this story if King Darius had put Daniel in a gorilla cage rather than a lion's den. I've never understood how the lion got the reputation of being "king of the beasts." I've seen animal trainers do things to lions they'd never think of trying with gorillas or elephants.

Did you ever see a cat make an elephant or a gorilla jump through a hoop of fire? Did you ever see a trainer stand in front of a gorilla with a chair and crack a whip at him? I'll bet you never saw anyone crazy enough to stick his head in a gorilla's or an elephant's mouth! Anything folks can control, they want to make "king." That's why they call the lion "king of the beasts." But I don't buy it. I'll stick with King Kong.

The story of Daniel in the lion's den reads like a page out of the Nixon administration. Those who were out to get Daniel created a situation where praying was illegal. I know how Daniel must have felt. During the summer of 1973 I was arrested for praying at the White House. I joined with nuns

and other dedicated folks to kneel and pray for an end to the bombing in Cambodia. We were taken off our knees and to jail.

The officer who arrested me seemed to feel guilty about the arrest. He said to me, "Mr. Gregory, I want you to know it wasn't because you were praying that you were arrested." I said, "Then why *did* you arrest me? For throwing watermelons at the White House?"

The officer was trying to say we were arrested for disorderly conduct. Our "disorderly" prayers were interfering with the orderly bombing in Southeast Asia. I bet if we were praying for Nixon to avoid impeachment we wouldn't have been busted!

Soldiers and military chaplains on the front line of battle pray for God's help in killing. Soldiers who are most successful in battle are brought to the White House and given a Congressional Medal of Honor for the dishonorable act of killing. But nuns and other citizens aren't allowed to pray at the White House to *stop* killing.

So prayer can be twisted and distorted to suit almost any purpose. Andy Abieta, governor, Isleta Pueblo, New Mexico, gives a description of the true meaning of prayer in a quote from the 1974 Peace Calendar of the War Resisters League:

> Let me tell you one thing. When the white man prays, he prays for what *he* wants, for *himself.* When the Indian prays he prays for other people. The last words of the Indian prayer are these: "*If there is anything left, let it be for me.*" You do not hear the Anglos pray that way. It is our way. We shall keep it our way.

The accusers of Daniel and the Watergate conspirators shared a common fate. Daniel's accusers were thrown to the lions, along with their families, and torn limb from limb.

The same is true of those involved in the Watergate scandal. Their families have been torn apart and destroyed by the revelations of Watergate. The break-up of former Attorney-General John Mitchell's marriage is just one example. So the Watergate conspirators, and their wives and kids, have been consumed by the dirty tricks and false accusations leveled against innocent people.

The day of government tricks and cover-ups may be drawing to a close. The beginning of the story of Daniel tells us why. Daniel and his three companions refused to eat meat and chose instead to eat only vegetables. As a result, they grew in true wisdom, understanding the meaning of dreams and having insight into visions of the future.

The high price and shortage of meat is forcing a lot of people to stop eating it. Folks are being driven closer to a proper diet. They just can't afford to eat wrong. As a result, they may find themselves growing in wisdom and insight. They will be able to see through government tricks and hypocrisies. Their eyes, ears, and minds will be open and aware, as never before.

So, food shortages and high prices may prove to be a blessing. Some folks might even become wise enough to take up the practice of regular fasting. As King Darius showed, the best thing to do when you want God to take notice is to go on a fast. God responds to clean minds in clean bodies. That's what God intended in the first place.

21
A Whale of an Order

(Jonah, Chapters 1-4)

Now Jonah was cooling it one day, just dozing, when he thought he heard the voice of the Lord speaking to him. The voice said, "It's come to my attention that the people of Nineveh are acting up. They've gotten very wicked. I need somebody to go there and bawl them out. And that somebody is *you!* So get up, get out there, and cry against that great city."

Jonah woke up with a start and said to himself, "No way!" But just in case it wasn't a dream Jonah got up in a hurry to flee from the presence of the Lord. In those days folks didn't seem to realize that God is everywhere.

Jonah decided to split to Tarshish. He found a ship headed in that direction, bought a ticket, and climbed on board. But, of course, God saw him going and sent a storm.

All the sailors were scared to death, and they began praying, each one to his own particular god. But, just in case, they decided to go for themselves and began to jettison their wares.

When he thought he'd escaped the presence of the Lord,

Jonah went way down below in the hold of the ship. And slumber being his favorite pastime, Jonah fell asleep.

The captain came below decks and caught Jonah snoozing. The captain said, "Man, wake up! Don't you know what's going on outside? Get up and start praying to your god, whoever that may be. Maybe your god is the one who can save our lives!"

Now Jonah was really in a jam. Here he was trying to hide from God, and the captain ordered him to pray!

Meanwhile, back on deck, the frightened sailors had their Ouija board out, trying to find out who was responsible for the storm. They were down on their knees, saying, "If it please thee, Ouija, tell us who is to blame for this evil that has come upon us." And the blame fell upon Jonah.

So the crew confronted Jonah, saying, "Who are you? What do you do for a living? Where do you come from? What ethnic group do you belong to?"

Jonah answered, "I'll take the last question first. I'm a Jew. I'm of the Hebrew persuasion. I fear the One God of heaven, Who made the sea and the dry land."

And the sailors said, "Our gods, man! What have you done?!" For the sailors knew that only the Most Powerful God could have gotten up such a storm. Jonah must have done something outrageous, like trying to flee God. And that's even worse than trying to fleece men!

When the huge waves threatened to capsize the ship, the sailors said to Jonah, "Since it's your fault we're in this mess, what do you suggest we do to you to calm down the sea?"

Jonah knew God wouldn't be satisfied with a little light whuppin'. So he said, "Just throw me overboard, and the storm will stop."

The sailors didn't want to dump Jonah. On the other hand, they had to do something. They called out, "Jonah's Lord? Are you listening? We don't want to die for whatever

this man has done. Please don't hold us responsible for his blood, because You had Your own reasons for doing this thing."

Then they threw Jonah overboard. The sea calmed down forthwith!

And, as so often happens when folks are in danger, the sailors got religion and became God-fearing men on the spot. They offered a sacrifice, made promises, and sang three choruses of "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

Meanwhile, out in the water, God sent a great fish to swallow up Jonah. Jonah remained inside the whale three days and three nights. In his hour of need Jonah also got religion. He cried out, "Deliverance belongs to the Lord!"

God got the message, dropped a word on the whale, and the great fish vomited, throwing Jonah up on the dry land. Jonah owed his life to a gut reaction.

But that was only the beginning of Jonah's troubles. While Jonah was drying out on shore, thinking about selling his story to *Field and Stream* magazine, God spoke up again. "I'm telling you once more to get to Nineveh and cry out against the city!" This time Jonah obeyed God.

Now Nineveh was a large city. It took three days just to walk through it. So Jonah walked a day's distance into the city, yelling, "In forty days Nineveh will be wiped out!"

The people believed Jonah was a prophet, speaking the word of God. So they repented. They announced a citywide fast and put on shirts of goat's hair.

The king took off his own royal robe, put on a hair shirt, and sat on a pile of ashes. The king decreed, "Let all folks, and all animals, go on a total fast. No food, no liquids, no water. No intake! Let everyone cry mightily to God and give up his violent and evil ways. Who knows? Maybe it's not too late." ("Cry mightily" meant "wail, baby, wail.")

Jonah laughed at all the carryings-on. He was sure God

was going to put a hurtin' on Nineveh. But God is in the business of forgiveness and mercy. When God saw the people fasting, and giving up their evil ways, God decided not to destroy the city after all. Which really made Jonah mad.

Jonah prayed and complained to God, "I knew it! I just knew you'd have second thoughts and be gracious and merciful, slow to anger and quick to forgive, always abounding in steadfast love! That's why I tried to run away in the first place!

"Look what a trick bag you put me into! I've been running around all over town, saying, 'God's gonna get you for that,' and you end up making a fool out of me! Do me a favor and take my life. I'd be better off dead!"

Then Jonah went away to sit and sulk. He was also curious to see what was really going to happen to Nineveh.

God saw Jonah sitting there. So God caused a castor-oil plant to grow up over Jonah and give him shade. Jonah fell in love with the plant, because he'd been pretty uncomfortable out there in the hot sun.

Just when Jonah thought he had it made in the shade, God sent a big worm to attack the plant. And the plant withered and died. But that's not all. God caused the wind and the sun to beat against Jonah.

God admonished Jonah, saying, "Will you look at yourself? You didn't sow that plant, water it, or make it grow. Yet you have nerve enough to criticize me for having pity upon some hundred and twenty thousand folks and their animals. And their only 'crime' was being naïve.

"Wiping them out would be like killing a little boy for not knowing his right hand from his left hand. Or like killing a cow because she didn't know her right hoof from the left. What kind of a God do you think I Am?!!"

Jonah had nothing to say. And he took a nip of the juice

he'd saved from the plant before it died. And for the first time in his life Jonah felt really clean.

Commentary

The story of Jonah poses an interesting historical question. If throwing a Jew overboard saved Jonah's ship, I wonder if throwing a Black cat overboard might have saved the *Titanic?*

Jonah is probably the first person in recorded history to show more concern for a plant than for human beings. But we've had more Jonahs in our day. Back when the war in Vietnam was raging full scale, I used to tell my audiences how I would end the war if I were president. I wouldn't have sent any young kids to fight the war. I'd have gone to all the prisons and drafted the sex maniacs. Then I'd have given them some LSD and some tennis shoes and sent them to Vietnam.

Can't you just see those headlines—"Twenty Vietcong Captured and Forty-seven Trees Attacked"? And when all the plant lovers in America read those headlines, they would have made sure the war ended that same day. As it was, some folks were more concerned about defoliation in Vietnam than burning babies.

It's sad to realize there are folks who are unconcerned about human life but insist, "Don't molest a tree!" There are some folks in the ecology movement who are in favor of abortion and opposed to cutting down trees.

But both the knife and the saw are inflicting wounds upon Mother Nature. Trees, plants, animals, and people are all children in Mother Nature's family and all part of God's creation. And they all have equal rights of creation.

The sad thing is that most folks act like Jonah. We are all born into Mother Nature's plan, with a proper place and purpose to enjoy a life of salvation and health. But most folks spend the rest of their lives running away from their responsibilities and duties in the natural order. They try to hide from God. Like Jonah, most folks "go overboard" in doing everything they can to defy the laws of Nature.

Instead of eating the proper foods Mother Nature provides, most folks disregard the rights of animals and kill them and cook them and eat them. Even vegetarians will boil their vegetables, burning out vital enzymes and nutrients, never realizing that Mother Nature's sun has done all the cooking necessary.

Water and air are the sources of life and health in Mother Nature's world, but folks pollute the water and foul up the air—and then pour chemicals into the water to try to undo the damage—just so they can move around at a faster, more unnatural pace and enjoy so-called modern conveniences.

The people of Nineveh and their king were smart enough to know what they had to do to escape the wrath and judgment of God. They had to stop their evil ways. They had to clean themselves out and get back to Mother Nature, so all the folks and all the animals went on an extended total fast. God saw the folks were serious and spared the town.

Fasting is the right place to start when a person gets serious about repenting. Fasting does have a cleansing effect. During long periods of fasting the body is cleansed of all the poisons and impurities that have built up in the body over years of improper eating habits. As the body is cleansed, the mind also is freed and expanded. A person's moral and spiritual sensitivities are heightened. A clean mind does result from a cleansed body.

Suppose a modern-day Jonah was slumbering comfortably on one of the islands in the Caribbean. And the voice of God came to him, saying, "Get up and go to the United States of America and cry against that great country. Wickedness prevails, and I am about to visit that nation with disaster."

Jonah awakes with a start, and, trying to escape the commandment of God, he boards the first flight out of the country. In a short time a storm grabs hold of the plane. All the passengers and the flight attendants, and even the pilots, are scared to death. Everyone starts praying furiously. Someone gets the bright idea of drawing high cards to see who is responsible for the storm. But Jonah, who has been sleeping in the back seat, suddenly wakes up and realizes immediately what is wrong.

So Jonah admits he is the cause of all the trouble and says everything will be all right if they throw him out of the plane. Of course, nobody wants to take such a drastic measure. But there happens to be a professor of ethics on board, on his way to deliver a lecture, and he convinces the passengers and crew that the greatest good for the greatest number requires dumping poor Jonah.

Jonah plummets toward earth, thinking surely he is doomed. But just at the right time the Goodyear blimp comes floating by, and Jonah plunges through into the belly of the blimp. Jonah remains inside the blimp three days and three nights. Then Jonah starts praying feverishly. Jonah promises that if God will deliver him out of the belly of this whale, he will do anything God asks. Whereupon Jonah comes across a parachute stashed away in the blimp, which he had overlooked before.

As Jonah is floating down to the ground he hears the voice of God saying, "I'm telling you just once more to cry

out against the United States and issue a warning of the impending doom!" This time Jonah decides to obey God.

It just so happens that Jonah's parachute carries him over the White House in Washington, D.C. Jonah lands unnoticed on the White House lawn because a parachute doesn't make any noise when landing, like a helicopter would, for instance.

Jonah walks into the White House to see if anybody is at home. He finds everyone in the East Room, since it is Sunday morning and a White House worship service is in session. The President is there, and all the members of the cabinet, and even the energy administrator.

With the voice of God still ringing in his ears, Jonah walks right up to the pulpit, pushes Billy Graham aside, and starts laying down God's decision. "In just forty days," Jonah cries, "God's gonna wipe out the United States!"

Of course, that's not the usual kind of preaching heard at a White House worship service. But Jonah continued his sermon. "You've already seen the devaluation of the American dollar on the world market," Jonah warned. "But that's only the beginning. There will be a sudden crash in the stock market, and the whole social and economic fabric of the United States will be depressed and destroyed.

"There will be no money, no jobs, and no food. There will be rioting in the streets and uncontrollable looting in stores and supermarkets. Power and communication services will come to a halt. Water supplies will become contaminated, and sanitation services will disappear.

"Hospitals will overflow. Disease will spread. People will die of starvation. Bodies will pile up in the streets. Fire storms will sweep the cities, and there will be neither the resources nor the manpower to put out the spreading fire.

"God will utterly destroy the United States because

great wickedness has prevailed and the commandments of God have been both mocked and forgotten!"

The signs and portents all around us suggest that such a modern-day Jonah would indeed be speaking the truth. But we can also imagine what his reception would be at a White House worship service!

A president with the wisdom of the king of Nineveh would go on national television and proclaim a nationwide fast. He would call for national repentance, beginning, of course, with himself. But unfortunately the President of the United States is more likely to order the Secret Service to drag Jonah off to jail. Then he would destroy the tape recordings of that particular worship service. And if anyone asked what happened at the service, the President's lawyers would say, "There was eighteen and a half minutes of silent prayer."

One day, in the not too distant future, we may look sadly back at what has happened in this country and say, "O for the wisdom of a king of Nineveh!"

PART II: *The New Testament*

22
A Star Is Born

(Luke 2:1-7; Matthew 2:1-12)

In those days, the august Caesar Augustus ordered a census throughout the Roman empire. Everybody had to go back to his hometown to register. Because Joseph was a descendant of David, he had to return to Bethlehem, the city of David, to register, so he set out with Mary, his intended bride, who was in the last weeks of her pregnancy. When they got to Bethlehem, they found a motel shortage because so many travelers were pouring into town. They stopped at every inn in town, but the No Vacancy sign was out. Finally, one innkeeper put them up in his barn.

That night Mary's time was up, and she gave birth to a baby boy. Roughing it as they were, Mary wrapped her baby in swaddling clothes as best she could. They named him Jesus, and he was the son of God. Some two thousand years later the Gideon Society put Bibles in all motel and hotel rooms as a reminder.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Herod was in power in Jerusalem. And wise men from the East came to town, saying, "Where is the child who has been born king of

the Jews? We have been studying our astrology charts, and we have seen his star in the East, and we followed it here."

Herod was most upset. He always fancied himself the king of the Jews, and of everybody else. So he called together all of his religious advisers, the chief priests, and the scribes and found out where the Hebrew Messiah was supposed to be born. And they answered, "In Bethlehem of Judea."

Herod became very friendly with the wise men and suggested they try Bethlehem, and conduct a thorough search for the child. "And when you find him, come back, be my guest, and tell me where he is so I can go and worship him also. We kings have to stick together."

And, lo, the star that they had been following appeared in the sky once again! The wise men rejoiced exceedingly to see it, and the star led them to the barn, where they found Mary with her baby, and they fell down and worshiped him. They dipped into their treasures and offered expensive, sweet-smelling, and sweet-tasting gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And, being wise men, they knew what Herod was up to—no good. So they bypassed Jerusalem and returned home by another route. Isn't it strange how folks today are always putting down astrology?

Commentary

Things have certainly changed since that first Christmas. If three kings gave gold, frankincense, and myrrh to a poor baby today, we'd call it welfare.

The first Christmas star traveled in front of the wise men to announce peace to the world. During the Christmas sea-

son today, some Hollywood stars travel to wherever the war is going on.

Look how far we've strayed from the natural childbirth of the baby Jesus. I'm somewhat of an authority on that subject, since I have ten kids. Jesus was born with Nature. His was a natural birth, surrounded by the animals. He was laid on a bed of fresh straw, with his father looking on.

Today the expectant mother is rushed off to a hospital. When her time to give birth arrives, she looks up to see she is surrounded by strangers. Her husband, her partner in creation, has to stay in the waiting room.

I remember when I went to see my wife in the hospital right after the birth of one of my kids. I wanted to see my child and hold her. It was against regulations, but the nurse was a fan of mine, so she said she'd arrange it.

Pretty soon she comes out with a costume, a mask, and some gloves. She said, "Here, Mr. Gregory, you'll have to put these on." I said, "Why? It's my kid!" She said, "We don't want the baby to pick up any infections you might have." And I answered, "What do you think I got now I won't have three days from now when I take this kid home?"

After I got all dressed up in my "daddy's costume," I said to the nurse, "If I had had to put on all this stuff to see my wife before, it would have been impossible to have this child in the first place!"

Of course, some things haven't changed at all. Jesus is the symbol for all those for whom there is no room in the inn—the outsiders, the outcasts, and the rejected. I wonder how many Blacks and other outsiders have been killed in highway accidents over the years because they were not accepted in motels and hotels, even though there *were* available rooms? So they were forced to keep driving and finally fell asleep at the wheel.

The tragic story of Dr. Charles Drew is but one example. Charles Drew was the Black doctor who developed the process for preserving blood and using it for transfusion. But the brilliant Dr. Charles Drew remained an "outsider" because his face was Black.

Dr. Drew died after an automobile accident during the long drive to find a hospital that would treat Black patients. Dr. Charles Drew needed a blood transfusion to save his life. But he died from the lack of his own discovery because there was no room for him at the inn.

And those in political power are still using undercover agents to get information on their so-called enemies, just like King Herod, who put baby Jesus at the top of his enemy list.

I've had some personal experience with enemy lists. During the Senate Watergate hearings it came out that the White House kept a list of "enemies"—such threats to national security as Carol Channing and myself. A newspaper reporter called me up right away and said, "Dick Gregory? It just came over the wire that you're on President Nixon's enemy list. What do you have to say?" I said, "Tell him I accept, before he changes his mind."

When I saw the actual list I realized what an honor it was to be included. At first I thought I was reading an advance copy of *Who's Who in America!* But there were a couple of things about that list I couldn't understand. President Nixon didn't include even one Vietcong.

Like the three wise men of old, the wise men and women on President Nixon's list saw through the schemes, plots, lies, and subversive activities of the government. They know that a king (or president) who gets real friendly and asks you to bring back some information is up to something.

The three wise men were astrologers and astronomers.

They kept their eyes focused upon the heavens and understood Nature and the Universal Order.

The holy message of Christmas is symbolized in the wise men's act of giving. Today folks call giving to poor and needy children "ADC" (Aid to Dependent Children) and resent it. Aid to poor children is bad for their character! But all kids are dependent, even Jesus was.

The star that beckoned the wise men from the East, who brought their gifts of praise, announced the reign of love and peace on earth. Yet other, unwise men have made journeys to foreign lands bringing their gifts of war to "defend the peace." Not gold but steel. Not frankincense but nerve gas. Not myrrh but napalm.

The real wise men understand that life represents the true victory. Every birth is a victory.

23
Dialogue with the Devil

(Matthew 3-4:11; Mark 1:1-13; Luke 3:3-4:13)

In those days, there came a man known as John the Baptist. John was a rugged country preacher, who hung out in the wilderness and wore camel's-hair clothes. Unlike country preachers today, who have a fondness for fried chicken, John ate locusts and wild honey.

All kinds of folks came out to John to confess their sins and be baptized. When the established religious leaders came to check him out, John said, "You sons of snakes! Don't think for one minute your religious credentials will save you from judgment! Repent, and start behaving like you have repented!"

John usually had a question-and-answer session at his open-air meetings. Some folks asked John, "How exactly are we to behave?" And John said, "If you've got two coats, give one of them to somebody who has none. If you have food, give some to folks who are hungry. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked. In other words, share."

Tax collectors, who, most of all people, had guilty consciences, asked, "Is there anything special we must do?" John

answered, "You know what you've been up to! Don't collect any more money than you're entitled to. Don't be lining your own pockets at the taxpayers' expense."

Even soldiers, who enforced the law of Rome in the land, came to John. John told them, "Stop bullying folks and become non-violent. Stop police brutality. Don't kill folks, and don't bloody up someone's reputation by lying about them. Be content with your salaries, and don't take bribes or extort money from folks."

When Jesus came up from Galilee to John at the river Jordan to be baptized, John recognized him. John said, "I know it's you, Lord. I've been waiting for you all my life. I shouldn't be baptizing you, Lord. You should baptize me." Jesus answered, "No, it's all right. You go ahead and do your thing. I must fulfill all the religious requirements."

Then a strange thing happened. Just as Jesus walked up out of the water, a dove flew down out of the sky and landed on Jesus. John knew it was the Holy Spirit. A voice was heard to say, "This is my own dear son, with whom I am well pleased." John knew it was the voice of God.

After John and Jesus went their separate ways, John was arrested and locked up when the word of his preachings got to Herod. Herod couldn't stand John hipping folks to the truth about him and his government.

And Jesus, who was full of the Holy Spirit, stayed in the wilderness with the wild beasts and fasted for the next forty days. After the fortieth day Jesus felt true hunger.

The devil had been skulking around the whole forty days, keeping his eyes on Jesus, just waiting for the right time to get at him. The devil thought Jesus just might be ripe for temptation. So the devil said, "Look, you and I both know you are the Son of God, right? And we both know you're hungry, right? So why don't you just prove Whose son

you are, and satisfy your hunger at the same time, by turning these stones into bread? You could make bagels out of those smaller ones."

Jesus said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which God speaks.' " Besides, Jesus knew you don't break a fast with bread.

So the devil said, "Walk with me up this mountain. I want to show you something." When they got to the top of the mountain, the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, all worldly power, in a single flash of time. And the devil said, "I control all worldly authority and power and governments. I'll give you all that power and glory if you will bow down and worship me, instead of worshiping God. What do you say to that?"

Again Jesus searched his memory for the right Scripture and came up with: "It is written, 'You shall worship God alone, and serve nobody else.' "

Once more the devil tried to tempt Jesus, saying, "Take another walk with me. Let's go to Jerusalem, the holy city. I want to admire God's temple." They climbed to the top of the highest pinnacle.

While they were looking out over the holy city, the devil said to Jesus, "If you're the son of God, why don't you jump down from here? You have nothing to worry about, because it's written in the Bible you're always quoting, 'God will send angels to guard and protect you,' and also, 'In their hands the angels will carry you,' so you won't stub your toe."

Jesus said, "You're forgetting that it is also written, 'You shall not tempt God.' " Then Jesus shouted, "Begone, devil, and don't come back!"

The devil just smiled and said, "Well, I tried!" As he departed from Jesus, he said to himself, "There'll be another time."

And the devil went back to ruling over those who had worldly power, authority, and glory.

Commentary

In the dialogue between Jesus and the devil, the devil tried to get Jesus to misuse his own spiritual power. The only outright offer the devil had to make was political power. The devil controlled governments, political power, and worldly authority. The devil seems to be saying, "Once I get you into that political power bag, I don't have to do anything else. You'll corrupt yourself."

We don't have to look far to see that truth illustrated. At the time of this writing, seven of President Nixon's top former aides have received grand jury indictments. It is beginning to look like President Nixon is going to have more friends in jail than Al Capone.

President Nixon couldn't have been any worse off if he had gone down to the local post office and picked his aides from the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list. He probably dismissed the suggestion because there were a couple of Black folks on that list.

I'm sure you've noticed there were no Black folks among the seven indicted aides. In the Black community, we look at the whole thing as a rerun of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." Seven indictments just for a start! I guess that will teach those former White House aides not to run around making fun of John Dean, calling him "Four Eyes."

But wouldn't it be wild if the President of the United States ended up in jail? I can just see him after he's served his time and gotten out, trying to get a job with his record. The President would go to the unemployment office, and his file

would be assigned to a Black cat who lost his first job when the poverty program was wiped out.

I can just hear that conversation. The Black cat would look at the file and say, "Nixon, Richard. Been serving some time, eh? Well, Dick, we don't have too much to offer. The unemployment picture hasn't changed too much while you were away. But we'll try to find something to help you help yourself.

"Let me look at what you've listed as qualifications. Well, we don't have any openings for recording engineers.

"No requests for used-car salesmen either. Your energy crisis wiped out that job category.

"To be honest with you, Dick, I've only got two jobs open. Have you ever picked any cotton, boy?

"The only other job is driving a school bus from Watts to Whittier, California."

But when it comes to really stinging indictments, John the Baptist was a master at handing them down. And the three groups he particularly singled out as hypocrites were clergymen, cops, and politicians (tax collectors). John pronounced God's judgment upon peace officers who shatter the peace, public officials who fleece the public, and preachers who preach what they don't practice. Sound familiar?

What John said to the religious establishment of his time could be said to the institutional church today. The church structure has become a bureaucracy like any other, and so much effort is expended by churchmen and-women in merely trying to maintain and preserve the institution. Salvation has become institutionalized. The church is still hung up on credentials, investments, and even religious artifacts.

Do you remember some time ago when a man got into the Vatican and broke Michelangelo's *Pietà* with a sledgehammer? The church responded immediately. It took a lot

longer to say anything about napalming little babies in Southeast Asia.

So they arrested the Vatican vandal. Personally, I think they should have arrested the guards. Can you imagine a guy walking into the Vatican, carrying a sledgehammer, and none of the guards seemed to think anything was wrong? They must have thought he was going in to play the "Anvil Chorus."

The young man was thirty-three years old, wore a beard, and claimed he was Christ reincarnate. And the Vatican was so hip they didn't dispute him. They just said, "We don't care who you are, don't come in here hittin' on our statues!"

If I were the Pope, I could have settled that claim right away. I would have told the guards to take the guy over to the river Tiber and tell him to walk it!

Can you imagine what would happen if Jesus really did come back today? What do you think the American Medical Association, Blue Cross and Blue Shield would do to him when they caught him walking through hospital wards and healing folks right off?

Or just imagine how upset the gravediggers' union would be when Jesus started raising folks from the dead. But I don't think anybody would be more upset than some of those sisters in church. Jesus would walk in, sit down, and right away one of those sisters would tell him, "Go home and take off those sandals and put on your Sunday shoes and some socks!"

Of course, Jesus would have some friends—just like before. Just imagine how popular Jesus would be with the winos on Skid Row when he changed water to wine.

It's sad to think that if Jesus came back today, folks would have him executed again. Only this time Jesus would be executed in the electric chair. Do you realize what that would mean? The electric chair would become the new

symbol. We would all have to wear little electric chairs hanging from chains around our necks!

Every time a new church would be built, way up on top you'd see an electric chair. Which really would pose a problem for devout Christians. How do you make the sign of the chair?

In contrast to John's strong words of indictment, the dove comes out of the sky to land upon Jesus. The dove seems to recognize a man of love and peace when it sees one. That's how it got to be the peace symbol. Maybe that explains why pigeons, rather than doves, hang out around government buildings and churches!

We tend to think of the rat as a symbol of violence, killing, and destruction. Maybe the violence among poor folks is the reason why rats feel comfortable around them. It could also explain a rat's fondness for garbage cans. Garbage cans are filled with scraps from a violent dinner, a dinner that has done violence to the body of the person who ate it.

Notice that the devil even had the audacity to quote Scripture in tempting Jesus to tempt God. And the devil has a lot of followers today doing the same thing. Folks quote passages from the Bible to justify anything—such as segregation, oppression of women, youth, or gays, anti-Semitism, war, or obedience to an unjust and oppressive government. Some folks who drink scotch, gin, and everything else justify it with the quote, "A little wine for thy stomach's sake" (I Timothy 5:23).

But Jesus had been fasting for forty days. His body was clean, and therefore his mind was sharp. He couldn't be tricked! He was in tune with the Universal Order, filled with the spirit of love, which is more important than playing games-of-proof tests.

24
Offing the Pigs

(Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-17; Luke 8:26-37)

One day Jesus and his disciples climbed into a boat and went to the country of the Gergesenes. As Jesus stepped out on the shore he ran smack into a wild man.

This man was so fierce and mean no one could get near him. Folks had tried to keep him in line by tying him up. But every time he would break the ropes or chains. There was nobody strong enough to hold him down. The man didn't have any home. He lived in the tombs, and all day and all night he would streak through the tombs, screaming and bruising himself with stones.

Jesus knew what was wrong. The man was possessed by demons and filled with unclean spirits. So Jesus commanded, "Come out of that man, you dirty spirits!"

The man fell down on his knees in front of Jesus and cried out in a loud voice, "What am I to you, Jesus, son of the Most High God? Don't torment me!"

But Jesus knew it was the unclean spirits talking and not the man himself. So Jesus said, "What is your name?"

And the man's voice answered, "My name is Legion, because there's a whole lot of us."

Now it just so happened that a large herd of pigs were feeding on the hillside. The demons were afraid they would have to go to hell, because they would have no new body to enter. So they said to Jesus, "Please transfer us into those pigs over there."

Jesus answered, "You've picked a good home. That's just the place for you. Leave at once!" And the demons quit the man and entered into the herd of pigs. The pigs went berserk and fled down the steep bank and were drowned in the sea.

When word got around about what Jesus had done, all the folks in the neighborhood asked him to leave. They didn't want any revolutionaries in their backyard killing pigs.

Commentary

The story of Jesus casting out demons reminds me of the popular book and movie *The Exorcist*. The movie showed horrible things happening, like folks' heads turning all the way around and the little possessed girl throwing up all over the priest.

The Exorcist didn't upset Black folks that much. I mean, you've never seen anybody throw up until you've seen a Black cat on Saturday night after he's had too much cheap wine. And you've never seen a head turn around until you've seen a Black cat sitting at a bar, wearing forty stolen watches, and someone yells, "Here comes the police!"

In fact, a lot of Black folks didn't even see the movie. I saw a Brother standing on the street corner the other day and I asked him, "Hey, man, have you gone to see *The Exorcist* yet?"

He said, "The what?"

I answered, "That movie, *The Exorcist.* Where they exorcise the Devil."

He said, "Hell, no, man. I get enough exercise every day working at the steel mill."

There's another very contemporary reference in the story of Jesus' casting out demons. The possessed man seems to have been the first streaker in history. He ran naked through the tombs, like a streaker in the Men's House of Detention in New York City.

When the streaking fad first hit the college campuses, I saw a report on the evening news on television. When I saw all those naked white folks running in every direction, I thought us Black folks had finally taken over!

But everybody's getting into the streaking act. I was really embarrassed the other day. My four-year-old son got caught streaking through the sandbox.

I have a question for anybody who is upset about streaking. Which is more healthy and normal: taking off your clothes so all the pores in your body can breathe in air, and then jogging—or swallowing a live goldfish?

The story about Jesus' casting out demons is as much about the pigs as it is about the possessed man. Jesus seemed to feel that the herd of pigs was a proper dwelling place for evil spirits. Many people are rightfully upset when they hear so-called radicals calling the police and other establishment figures "pigs." But there does seem to be precedent in the Bible.

The possessed man told Jesus his name was Legion. Remember that the police of the time were the Roman soldiers, or the Roman *legion.* So "legion" symbolized police brutality, law and order without justice—I wonder if that explains where the American Legion got its name.

By the way, have you noticed that the higher the price of

pork gets, the less inclined folks are to call the cops "pigs"?

In the story, the pigs themselves were innocent and neutral. But when the demons took them over, the pigs went on a self-destructive trip! In like manner, when some cops allow themselves to be controlled by demonic forces, abusing folks with words or billy clubs or shooting them without cause, it is a self-destructive trip.

Let me say one more thing about pigs and demons. From my point of view, the unhealthy and improper food people shove into themselves feeds (or more properly *awakes*) the evil spirits inside them. An unclean body creates an unclean mind, unclean attitudes, and unclean behavior. I personally believe that an improper diet, feeding the unclean spirits causes attitudes of violence, hostility toward one's self and others, wars, racism, and so on.

Folks have a tendency to criticize pigs because they eat garbage and slop. But folks forget that garbage and slop are merely the remains of their own dinners. Pigs are eating the same food people eat. They just have a later dinner schedule.

25
5 Loaves Plus 2 Fishes Equals 12 Baskets of Leftovers

(Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17)

Another time, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's get away from the crowd for a while and go to a restful spot for a quiet little weekend together." Jesus and his disciples had been so busy preaching, and teaching, and healing the sick, and restoring sight to the blind, and making the lame to walk, that they hadn't taken time out even for meals. So they all climbed into a boat and went away for a holiday.

But the multitudes saw them leaving and guessed where they were going. So everybody hurried ahead on foot and got there before Jesus arrived. When the boat landed, Jesus saw the great throng of people, and he took pity on them. They looked like a helpless flock of sheep in search of a shepherd. So Jesus began teaching the multitude many things. The disciples looked at one another and said, "Well, there goes the weekend!"

Jesus spoke and taught all day long, and the hour grew late. The disciples said to one another, "Even though man does not live by bread alone, we're going to have a problem when these folks get hungry." So they went to Jesus and said,

"We hate to interrupt your sermon, Lord, but it's getting late. You better send these folks home to supper."

And Jesus answered, "Why? You feed them!"

The disciples answered, "This is a very lonely spot, Lord. There aren't any stores around here. Besides, at the going price of a penny a loaf, it would cost about fifty dollars to buy bread for this crowd."

Jesus said, "Well, we'll just have to make do with what we've got. Go out among the crowd and see how many loaves of bread you can find."

The disciples checked out the multitude and reported back to Jesus, "There's only five loaves in the whole crowd, and two fishes."

So Jesus told everybody to sit down on the grass. There were about five thousand men, plus women and children. Jesus took the five loaves and the two fishes and looked up toward heaven and said the blessing. Then he said to the disciples, "Start feeding!"

And the disciples began passing out the food, and the food kept multiplying, and behold, there was enough for every man, woman, and child! Everybody had enough!

Even more wondrous, when the disciples cleaned up after supper, there were twelve baskets full of leftovers. Jesus saw how amazed the disciples were, and he said, "See what can happen when you remember to say the blessing before every meal?"

Commentary

Reading about feeding five thousand folks with only two fishes, I wonder if that's how chopped herring got its start? And can you believe the price of food in those days? Bread was a penny a loaf, and fifty dollars would buy enough

bread for five thousand folks! Food prices today have really gotten out of hand; like onions, for example. My wife used to cry when she peeled onions. Now she cries when she buys them. Onions have gotten so expensive it will soon be a status symbol just to have onions on your breath.

Meat prices are really outrageous, although it doesn't affect me, since my family is vegetarian and I'm a fruitarian. I read not long ago that chickens in Chicago might be selling for five dollars apiece. Can you imagine paying five dollars for a live chicken, with no teeth and only three toes? Before I'd pay five dollars for a chicken, I'd buy a dozen eggs and sit on them myself!

The price of pork really hurts folks in the Black community (although not as much as eating the pork). Pigs' feet and chitlins cost as much as steak. My cousin cooks ten pounds of chitlins every Sunday, and you should hear his neighbors complain. They run out of their apartments, complaining about the stink. But that's all changed now. My cousin cooked ten pounds of chitlins last Sunday and got mugged.

As a non-meat-eater, I find it curious that the Gospel of Matthew never says anyone actually ate the fishes. Matthew says Jesus blessed the loaves and the fishes and gave the loaves to the disciples to distribute among the people.

The whole hunger bit seems to have been a hang-up only for the disciples. The multitude didn't complain of being hungry as far as we know. Maybe, as part of his teaching, Jesus put the crowd on a five-day fast, or perhaps the loaves are only a symbol of the bread of life. But whatever actually happened, they were "satisfied."

I can't help wondering also if there weren't more lunch baskets in the crowd than the one with five loaves and two fishes someone gave to the disciples. Those who had lunch baskets could have been keeping them hidden, because they

were worried they'd have to give some to others and wouldn't have enough for themselves. Then, under the influence of Jesus, everyone opened up and shared with their neighbors and found there was more than enough for everybody.

In any case, the real message of the story is the concept of *sharing*. Folks are always looking for ways to avoid sharing on an individual, one-to-one basis, always trying to get someone else—like philanthropic foundations, government agencies, and so on—to deal with poverty problems. But the real answer lies in individual hearts.

Take the food problem in the slums and ghettos. The frequent response to the problem is for folks to get together and hold a meeting. At the meeting, those attending will talk about how to involve other groups and government agencies. A consumer's guide for ghetto residents will be prepared. But the real problem is no money to buy food.

Sharing means not looking for others to take over your own responsibility. Sharing is a truly selfless action; a willingness to shoulder your own responsibility and rid yourself of the fears and apprehensions over the demands that may be placed upon you. Sharing is different from a hand-out. If I am hungry, don't give me food stamps. Share *your* dinner with me. When folks truly open up to that concept of sharing, there is always enough to go around.

In six French-speaking West African nations, millions of people now face possible death from starvation, "the worst drought since Biblical times." Yet, in spite of rising food prices and increasing food shortages in the United States, enough food is wasted every day in New York City alone to feed starving African people—and have twelve baskets of leftovers.

26
Let Go of Things

(Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)

A young man asked, "Good Teacher, tell me what to do to inherit eternal life!"

And Jesus answered, "It's funny you should call me 'good.' Only God is good. Anyway, to gain eternal life you must obey the commandments. Don't lie, don't kill, don't steal, don't commit adultery, honor your parents, and all the rest."

The young man answered, "But I've done all those things since I was a little kid." And, seeing that the young man was honest and sincere, Jesus loved him.

So Jesus said, "What do I tell a young man who has everything? Son, you lack one thing, although most folks would think you have it all. Go, and sell all that you have, and distribute the converted cash to the poor. That way, although you'll be penniless on earth, you will have treasure stored up in heaven. After you've redistributed your wealth, come back and follow me."

The words of Jesus came as quite a blow to the young man, because he was very, very rich and he had many possessions. He walked sadly away.

Jesus watched him go and said to the others around, "It's hard for rich folks to enter the kingdom of God. They love their possessions. They place a higher value on property than on their fellow human beings."

Jesus continued, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

Commentary

The story of the rich young man reminds me of my Momma. Every time Momma came home mad at something the rich white folks she worked for had done to her that day, she would grab her Bible and look up the passage, "It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven."

I used to try to reason with her. "Momma," I would say, "they didn't have needles when the Bible was written." And she'd answer, "The Lord knew they would one day."

Later in life I learned the true meaning of the teaching. A needle's eye was an arch in old Arabian cities. A rich man's camel had a harder time getting through than the poor man's because the load was bigger.

Many so-called religious folks are always looking for God to bless them financially. When I read some time ago about the Indiana farmer who found skyjack ransom money —five hundred thousand dollars—on his property, I knew right away he was an atheist. I knew it for the simple reason that the farmer *returned* the money. If the farmer had been one of those always asking God for money, he would have kept all the loot. He would have fallen on his knees right

there in the field and said, "Thank you, Lawd! I planted beans and you grew me money!"

Some "religious" folks buy a prayer cloth that has been blessed by some preacher or evangelist, hoping it will bring them good fortune and financial blessing, never thinking of buying a shirt or blouse—or even a handkerchief—for a poor person who has no clothes.

Jesus looked at the rich young man and right away sized up his problem. The young man had observed all the rules of the church to the letter, but his attitude toward money, property, and possessions was tripping him up. Jesus told him to get rid of all that so he could get down to basics.

Organized religion and the institutional church don't seem to have heard or understood this teaching of Jesus. Otherwise, it would divest itself of its wealth and real estate, its slum properties and its corporate stocks, and give money freely to the poor. It has forgotten the commandment of Jesus, "Do this and follow me."

27
Letting Your Seeds Fall Where They May

(Mark 4:3-8; Matthew 13:3-8; Luke 8:5-8)

Jesus was sitting in a boat, and his listeners were gathered on the beach. He told them this story:

"A sower went out to plant his crop. He scattered the seed everywhere, indiscriminately. He wasn't at all selective. He thought the more seed sown, the better the chances for a bountiful harvest.

"As the sower moved over the unplowed ground, some of the seed fell along the path, where it was trampled underfoot by folks walking through the field, or else eaten by birds. Some seed fell in rocky ground and grew too quickly. Lacking the right amount of soil and moisture, the seedlings were scorched to death by the hot sun. And some seeds fell in among weeds and thorns, and they were choked to death.

"But some of the seeds fell into good, rich soil, and they were plowed into the field and they grew. And when harvest time came, those seeds yielded thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times.

"Be careful what, where, and how you sow."

Commentary

The sower appears to be a very contemporary farmer. He acts like he's been receiving farm subsidies so long he has forgotten how to plant!

Farm subsidy is a form of welfare for big farms and wealthy farmers. Another name for it would be "reaping where you have not sown." Unlike the welfare program in the slums and ghettos, government farm subsidies pay large amounts for folks not to work or to plant crops. Welfare programs in the ghetto pay small amounts to folks who are constantly admonished to get a job and sometimes forced to. Perhaps if slums and ghettos were called "urban plantations," welfare would be more popular.

The sower's method of scattering seed indiscriminately could well serve as a symbol for a wasteful America. America has recklessly wasted natural resources, cutting down trees, killing the soil, and consuming resources at the greediest pace imaginable. The so-called energy crisis is only a symptom of the real problem, an all-out war against Nature.

Like the seeds that were choked by weeds and thorns, Americans cough and choke from the foul, polluted air produced by cars, planes, and other consumer toys. Like the seeds that were scorched by the sun, more and more soil in America has been stripped of its productivity. And all the while, reminding us of the seeds eaten by birds or trampled underfoot, political vultures and corporation giants have trampled on the lives of people, the only seeds of true greatness America has.

The key to my understanding of the parable of the sower is found in the dictionary definition of the word *sow:* "to

scatter seed upon, in, or over, as a field." The definition seems to indicate that the sower has a choice.

I would choose "in." The power to attain a truly rich and abundant life lies within each individual. Unfortunately, most folks are so hung up on money, success, and status they fail to make contact with that source within themselves. They lay the seeds of their faith upon something outside themselves—government, education, degrees and qualifications, friends, or whatever.

I have said before, the main problem with education today is that students are so busy learning how to make a living that they forget to learn how to live. A person is born with the potential for true spiritual wisdom. And when that inner resource is tapped, and life is lived in tune with Nature and universal moral laws, the yield will indeed be rich and abundant.

28
There'll Be Some Surprises!

(Matthew 25:31-46)

Jesus sat upon the Mount of Olives one day and had a long, private talk with his disciples. At one point he said:

"You know, there's going to be a Last Judgment one day, and you better believe there'll be some surprises.

"The Judge will be sitting on the throne in glory and splendor, the symbol of pure justice, and there will be angels around everywhere. All the nations and all the peoples will be gathered before the Throne of Judgment, and the Judge will separate folks from one another like a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The good folks will go to the right, and the bad folks will go to the left.

"Then the Judge will say to the folks on the right, 'Come and get your reward. Receive the kingdom which has been waiting for you ever since the world began! Because when I was poor and hungry, a victim of famine and starvation, you sent me food. When I was parched, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, lonely and afraid, you took me in, welcomed me, and comforted me. When I was naked, you gave me clothes. When I was in prison, you came to visit

and tried to help. You saw that I got a fair trial, and you tried to improve prison conditions. Now it is time to show my appreciation.'

"And the good folks will say, 'Lord, we don't mean to seem ungrateful, but we don't remember ever seeing you before. When did we do all these things for you?'

"And the Judge will answer, 'Why, you've been doing them all your lives! Every time you helped or comforted one of the very least of my creation, a poor, needy brother or sister, you did the same thing for me. When you rendered service to your fellow human beings, you served me too.'

"Then the Judge will turn to the folks on the left and say, 'You can all go to hell! Because when I was hungry, you supported a cutback in the poverty program and bad mouthed welfare. When I was thirsty, you polluted the waters and streams and shut off the faucets in the tenements of the poor. When I was naked, you didn't care; as long as I didn't appear naked on the street or in a movie! Then you had me arrested! When I was old and lonely, you turned your back on me. When I was in prison, you said I was just a criminal and deserved the punishment I got. When I cried for prison reform, you shouted back, 'Law and order! Capital punishment! Crime in the streets!'

"And the bad folks will say, 'Lord, you're wrong! We never did that to you. We may have done it to those bothersome poor folks, or those useless old folks, or those dirty hippies, or those niggers, kikes, commies, faggots, and spics, or those muggers, winos, junkies, and rapists. But never to you, Lord!'

"And the Judge will say, 'You've just condemned yourselves. Every time you did it to one of those—even the very least of those—you did it to me. So sweat it out in hell, while I take these other folks to heaven with me.' "

Commentary

This story reminds me of something that happened to my cousin. You've heard of folks getting so drunk they fell down and lay in the gutter? Well, he got so drunk he ended up layin' in the bus lane!

First, the Salvation Army band marched on him, and it really got to him. He could take the crowd, but those tunes!

Then, after the Salvation Army gave up on him, the church sisters gathered around. One church sister was wearing a cross that hung all the way down to her knees. She started yelling at him, "You drunken fool! The Lord don't like no ugly. You ought to be ashamed. I hope a bus comes by and runs over your head!"

Remember, those were church folks talking like that! They forgot about Jesus' saying, "Judge not that you be not judged." So while they were all standing on the curb, judging my cousin out in the bus lane, a bus driver came down the street who was drunker than he was. All of a sudden the bus accidentally swerved, jumped up on the curb, and wiped 'em all out.

You have to be very careful about judging folks by their appearance, about putting other folks down because they don't look like you think they should look or don't act like you think they should act. Don't look at a person's garment, look at the human being. The rule applies to all garments—a cop's uniform, a soldier's uniform, a dashiki, a beggar's rags, or white tie and tails. Maybe that's really the message streakers are trying to get across. Underneath it all is a human being with the same universal power and worth as all other human beings.

Jesus speaks of a Day of Judgment when the court record will be written by each individual's own hand. Each person will be his or her own court stenographer. The Judge will not ask how much money you made, or how much of a celebrity you were, or how many elections you won. The only testimony admitted as evidence will be the answer to the question, "How much *service* did you render to your fellow human beings?"

There will be some surprises when that testimony is heard. Many of the last will be first and the first will be last. A lot of so-called religious folks will expect to be first because of their church membership. But the only credentials relevant to the court record will be deeds, *actions*.

All the folks currently going through analysis on psychiatrists' couches, and everybody else as well, ought to pause and give equal time to some self-analysis, reviewing themselves about their own "service record" before it is too late.

29

There Goes the Neighborhood

(Luke 10:25-37)

A lawyer stood up to put Jesus to the test. He asked, "Teacher, I would like to inherit eternal life. Could you outline the procedures by which my desire might be accomplished?"

Jesus answered, "You're a lawyer. What does the Law say?"

The lawyer answered, "The Law states you should love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the accompanying clause to the same statute states you should love your neighbor like yourself."

Jesus said, "You got it. And you've just answered your own question."

But the lawyer persisted. "Teacher, the Law is somewhat vague on the latter point. Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answered with a story:

"A man was traveling down that dangerous seventeen-mile stretch from Jerusalem to Jericho. And as so often happens, the traveler was mugged and left lying by the road half dead.

"Pretty soon a priest came walking down the road. When he saw the bleeding man he crossed over to the other side, pretending he didn't see the man in need.

"A little while later another man of God, this time a Levite, came by. When the Levite saw the wounded man, he too passed by on the other side. They refused to get involved.

"The next person to come by was a Samaritan. He didn't stop to think about danger, only that the wounded man needed help.

"The Samaritan gave him emergency first aid. He poured wine and oil on the wounds to ward off infection. He carried him to an inn and gave the innkeeper a fifty-cent advance, saying, 'Take good care of this man until I come back. Keep track of the expenses, and I'll pick up the tab.'

"Now, which of the three men proved to be a neighbor to the man who was mugged?"

The lawyer answered, "The one who showed mercy and got involved."

And Jesus said, "See that you do the same. You never know when you might need a neighbor yourself."

Commentary

The road between Jerusalem and Jericho reminds me of the streets of Washington, D. C. Crime got so bad there not long ago that the inmates of Sing Sing penitentiary voted Washington "The Town They'd Be Most Likely to Succeed In."

Washington used to be the only city in America where a cat could stick up a bank and get mugged on his way to his getaway car. I remember trying to hail a taxicab one night in Washington. A nervous cabdriver stopped, rolled down

his window a crack, and said, "Buddy, I'll take you any place you want to go—as long as you don't mind riding on the hood."

But President Nixon said all that was changed now. In his 1974 State of the Union message, the President said, "Right here in this nation's capital, which a few years ago was threatening to become the crime capital of the world, the rate in crime has been cut in half."

What the President meant was that crime had got out of the streets into the home, his own particularly. The President promised to take crime out of the streets and he did. While crime in the streets decreased, "high crime and misdemeanors" in the White House soared. What happened with crime in Washington was that President Nixon *centralized* it. He put it right in the White House where he could keep an eye on it.

The commandment states, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It says to me that you can't love yourself unless you love your neighbor. Expressions of racism, bigotry, and hatred show how those folks feel about themselves.

When residents of a lily-white neighborhood gang up to keep out new neighbors, they are passing by on the other side. They are rewording the commandment to read, "Love your property as you love yourself."

When people watch muggings and killings and refuse to get involved, passing by on the other side or watching from behind the windows of their homes, they are really saying they don't think their own lives are worth saving.

The same principle applies to going off to war, the supreme expression of hatred toward one's neighbor. Look at it this way. If I agree to go to war, it means, of course, I agree to kill. But it also means I am willing to put myself in a position of being killed by that neighbor I am taught to call my

"enemy." So signing up to go off to war is really an act of voluntary suicide.

If I happen to come back from the war, I can wash the blood off my hands so I cannot see it. But the blood on my mind will stain my every thought for the rest of my life. Only a person who truly hates himself would allow such a thing to happen. But it will not happen if my love of my neighbor is stronger than my love of my country.

Think of how many wars have been fought, or are being fought, by neighbors: North and South Koreans, North and South Vietnamese, Arabs and Jews, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Blacks and whites in South Africa or in the United States, and so on. Brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, lovers, sweethearts, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, cousins are fighting over property, or territory, or rights of passage. Hate your neighbor as yourself.

So every time I pick up a newspaper and read of a new war, I say to myself, "Well, there goes the neighborhood."

30
Turn About Is Fair Play

(Matthew 18:21-35)

Then Peter came up to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how often am I supposed to forgive someone who has done me wrong? Would you say as many as seven times?"

Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but seventy times seven!"

Peter was puzzled and said, "Excuse me, Lord. But do you mean forty-nine times, or four hundred and ninety?"

Jesus replied, "Neither one. It's like the story of a king who decided one day to check the books of all the public officials in his kingdom. So he called them in, one by one, and a certain official was found to be twenty million dollars short. Since he had obviously embezzled the money, the king decided to press charges against him. The penalty was to sell him, and his wife, and his children, as partial payment for the debt.

"When the official heard his punishment, he fell on his knees before the king and begged, 'Lord, have patience with me. I'll pay you back somehow.' And the king, moved with pity for the man and his family, revoked the punishment and forgave the debt completely.

"As soon as the public official got outside, he came upon one of his colleagues who owed him twenty dollars. He grabbed the man's throat and demanded, 'Man, gimme my money!' The man fell on his knees and said, 'Have patience with me. I'll pay you later.' But the first official had his colleague locked up in jail.

"Word got back to the king, and he was furious. The king called the first official back before him. The king said, 'You evil so-and-so! I forgave your twenty-million-dollar debt just because you begged me. Don't you think you could have had mercy upon your fellow official who only owed you a lousy twenty bucks?' And the king ordered the man thrown into prison until his whole twenty-million-dollar debt was paid up.

"That's what God will do to you, if you don't forgive other folks just as God forgives you."

Commentary

In his first State of the Union message after his re-election, President Nixon took a position just the opposite of the king in the story. President Nixon vowed, "We shall have no pity on criminals." A year later, the President was searching all over the country for friendly audiences, who would give him a sympathetic hearing, if not downright pity.

So it's always a good idea to keep a place open in your heart for forgiveness, because you never know when you'll need some forgiveness yourself. When former United States Attorney-General John Mitchell was indicted, I couldn't help wondering if he had second thoughts about how he had treated some other folks during his tenure in the Justice Department. And if John Mitchell ever has to serve some

time in federal prison, it sure will put a hurtin' on me, because I'll have to take a brick and smash open a mailbox and get arrested myself. I couldn't stand the thought of John Mitchell alone in jail without me right there alongside him to bug him with some questions.

I'd ask him, "When you had Angela Davis in jail for two years, and you knew there was no real case against her, did you ever think you'd be in the same fix one day?" (John Mitchell would have the best chance of beating his rap if he had sense enough to hire Angela Davis's lawyers.)

Or I'd ask him, "When you were accusing the Berrigan brothers, along with some nuns, of being part of a plot to kidnap Henry Kissinger, did you ever think you'd be on the other end of the accusing finger one day?" Of course, I've never been able to understand how anybody could seriously believe that so-called plot to kidnap Kissinger. I mean, Henry Kissinger might be a heck of a dude, but there aren't any *nuns* who want him!

Folks often refer to President Nixon as King Richard, but he's really more like the public official who refused to forgive his colleague than he is like the king in the story. President Nixon is the one who campaigned on the issue of "law and order" and who is always talking about "welfare-cheaters."

But there's no difference between a "welfare-cheater" and a "tax-chiseler." They're both enemies of taxpayers and folks on welfare.

The story also illustrates America's behavior in world affairs. When the American dollar got bad and the country plunged into a financial crisis, America went to the world financial market and begged for sympathy and understanding. But when other nations come looking for help, America always demands a price for being "sympathetic" or

"understanding." America asks for military bases or power and control over the needy country's affairs, as a return for granting favors.

It's the same way with folks in their personal lives. People always want, and expect, to be forgiven for their own wrongdoings, but they take great delight in seeing other folks get punished for theirs. When they see "backsliders" fall upon hard times, church folks are always saying, "Get 'em, Lord! They deserve it!"

It all boils down to putting ourselves in the place of our brother or sister who comes to us for forgiveness. The key words in the parable for me are "fell on his knees." Both public officials fell on their knees when they knew they needed forgiveness. In other words, they assumed a posture of humility.

Folks are so quick to assume a humble posture when they are caught doing wrong. Even the meanest or most militant cat can get very humble before the judge's bench in court. But folks have a tendency to forget how it felt to get caught, or forget the posture of humility, when they have been wronged by someone else. They're likely to kick the other person down on their knees.

Even while he was caught "knee-deep" in his own wrongdoing, President Nixon continued to oppose amnesty for young men who left the country to avoid the draft. He refused to forgive others while seeking amnesty for himself.

Maybe the young people who long to come home should say they weren't trying to avoid the draft, they were just claiming "executive privilege." They claimed the privilege of refusing to be "executioners" in Southeast Asia.

31
Minimum Wage

(Matthew 20:1-16)

Jesus told another story to illustrate what the kingdom of heaven is like. Jesus said:

"Once upon a time, there was a grape grower, who went out very early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He found some men lined up at the union hall, looking for a day's work. They agreed to work for the going rate of a quarter a day, and they started to work at six a.m.

"Three hours later, the little old winemaker saw some other men standing idly in the marketplace, so he hired them for the rest of the day at the same pay. At noon, and at three p.m., he hired other workers, and he kept on hiring right up to five p.m.

"An hour later, at six p.m., the work day was over. So the owner of the vineyard said, 'Call in the workers from the field and pay them. Start with those who came at five p.m. and work on up to the early birds.'

"When the workers who started early in the morning saw the others getting a quarter, they thought they would surely get a bonus, because they had worked longer hours. But

when their turn came, they also were paid a quarter. And they were mad! They complained to their employer, 'We ought to report you to the grievance committee. We worked all day for a quarter, and those other guys only had to work an hour for the same pay. What're you trying to pull?'

"And the little old winemaker answered, 'Now wait just a minute. Didn't we agree on your daily wage *before* you went into the field? I'm not cheating you. If I want to pay equal wages for unequal work, that's none of your business. It's my money.

" 'Or are you trying to tell me I'm a generous fool? Sometimes it's necessary to give preferential treatment. In my vineyard, the last will be first and the first will be last.' "

Commentary

With all the furor over quota systems and preferential treatment for minorities, this parable has a very modern meaning. The last shall be first and the first shall be last. It sounds like the old saying in the Black community, "We're the last hired and the first fired."

Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other minorities have been kept out of the "vineyards" of employment, educational opportunity, union membership, and so on for a long, long time. It was no fault of their own. The invitation just came very late in the day. Therefore, those last must be first for a time, until justice and equality prevail in all the vineyards of opportunity in America.

Life here on earth seems to be based upon the seniority system. Congressional committees are chaired by senators and representatives who have the most seniority. Even in local churches the folks who really run things are usually

those who have been around the longest. Seniority seems to be a fact of life in America, until it comes to providing a life of dignity and comfort for senior citizens. When a person retires, all respect for seniority is forgotten, and senior citizens are expected to live on pitifully inadequate Social Security payments.

Jesus says life is not like that in the kingdom of heaven (or the vineyard). There is no seniority system and no retirement plan. Everybody is the same, no matter at what age in life they accept and recognize their own salvation and enter the vineyard. Salvation is not earned like Boy Scout merit badges. Entering the vineyard is the important thing, not the hour of entry. It's better to enter even at the last hour than to remain living a life of idle waste.

Since there's no preferential treatment in the kingdom of heaven, is there any need for denominations here on earth?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Like St. Paul and Dr. Martin Luther King, *Dick Gregory* has spent a lot of time in jails and churches. Gregory has been arrested more than three dozen times, during a fish-in with Nisqualy Indians in Washington State, leading marches protesting *de facto* segregation in Chicago, and most recently when he knelt down to pray in the White House (charge dismissed). During the civil rights movement in the South, he spoke at rallies and services in hundreds of churches. He was introduced to the philosophy of nonviolence by Dr. King and came to feel that "thou shalt not kill" must also include the killing of animals for food. Therefore he gave up eating meat, became a vegetarian and, later, a fruitarian. He has fasted many times to protest the war in Indochina, to call attention to the plight of American Indians, and to illuminate the drug scene.

Dick Gregory achieved fame as a comedian more than a decade ago. In the past several years, he has exchanged the night club circuit for the campus circuit and speaks before hundreds of audiences every year. His books include *Nigger, Write Me In!, No More Lies, Dick Gregory's Political Primer* and *Dick Gregory's Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat.*

James R. McGraw has collaborated with Gregory on most of his books. An ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, he is a graduate of Yale Divinity School and a contributing editor to *Christianity & Crisis* magazine.